

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
FOI/PA  
DELETED PAGE INFORMATION SHEET  
FOI/PA# 1219777-0

Total Deleted Page(s) = 32

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Attached Civil Division memo requests investigation in connection with three actions in admiralty which grew out of the Texas City Disaster in April, 1947. Three ships being loaded with ammonium nitrate fertilizer, were virtually destroyed by explosions which caused extensive loss of life, injuries and property damage, with total damages running into millions of dollars. Some 2,000 actions were brought under Federal Tort Claims Act by plaintiffs seeking to recover more than \$200,000,000 from the Government. We conducted a tremendous amount of investigation. These suits were successfully defended and the Supreme Court held Government not liable.

This memo requests investigation to assist Department in defeating petitions, filed by owners of the 3 ships involved, for exoneration from or limitation of liability. Government has claim against the owners of \$350,000 for damage to Government property plus claims assigned to Government by persons whose claims are being paid under a special relief act passed 8-12-55.

Memo requests investigation to show whether management of the vessels was negligent. Showing of such negligence will defeat their petitions for limitation of liability.

GIR 6

Legal Attache, Paris

November 15, 1956

Director, FBI (131-new)

①  
SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and

Republic of France

Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTERS

11-1  
5-1  
4-1

Attached are two copies of a self-explanatory memorandum dated 11/9/56 in which the Civil Division of the Department requests certain investigation in captioned admiralty actions which arise out of the Texas City disaster of April 16 and 17, 1947.

Your attention is invited to item 5 on page 6 of the attached memorandum wherein the Department requests that we determine whether certain members of the crew of the SS Grandcamp are in the United States. The last known addresses for these persons are in France.

It is requested that you cause appropriate inquiry to be made through any organization maintaining records regarding the employment of seamen or through such other sources as may be available to determine whether any of these persons are presently in the United States or are employed aboard vessels which can be expected to call at U. S. ports.

You should arrange to have appropriate inquiry conducted as soon as possible and furnish the results to the Bureau at the earliest possible date.

Enclosures (2)

cc: 1 - Foreign Liaison Unit (route through for review)

JKP:ige  
(5)

RECORDED

131-343-2

20 NOV 20 1956

EX-125

EGAT  
NOV 16  
8

Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
Rosen \_\_\_\_\_  
Tamm \_\_\_\_\_  
Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

NOV 23 1956

Handwritten signatures and initials, including "JKP" and "E".



SAC, Houston

November 15, 1956

Director, FBI (131-new)

SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and  
Republic of France

Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Attached for each office are copies of the Civil Division memorandum dated 11/9/56 requesting investigation in captioned Admiralty Matters arising out of the Texas City disaster. Six copies of instant memorandum are furnished to Houston for possible use in setting out any leads developed. Two copies are furnished to Dallas.

Houston will observe that these petitions in admiralty are the subjects of Houston files 62-833 (SS Wilson B. Keene, Admiralty No. 1868), 62-832 (SS Highflyer, Admiralty No. 1869), and 62-840 (SS Grandcamp, Admiralty No. 1870). To facilitate reporting of the investigation presently requested by the Department and the subsequent reporting of the disposition of these petitions and the Government claims involved, the Bureau is opening a new 131 file on this matter.

The Bureau is forwarding a request to the Legal Attache, Paris, to have appropriate inquiry made in France to determine whether any of the five individuals listed under item 5 on page 6 of the Department memorandum are in the United States.

Houston and Dallas will note that the Department does not desire any interview with the three persons listed under item 4 on page 6. Investigation should be limited to determining the current address and employment of those persons.

Enclosures (6)

cc: 2-Dallas, with enclosures (2)

cc: 62-91136 (SS Wilson B. Keene)

62-91259 (SS Grandcamp)

62-90876 (SS Highflyer)

JKP:ige

NOV 20 1956

Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
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Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

RECORDED-82

131-363-3

UNRECORDED COPY FILED IN

SAC, Houston

Both offices will place this matter in line for immediate and continuous attention and submit reports completing the investigation at the earliest possible date.

GIT

Assistant Attorney General  
George Cochran Drub

December 7, 1956

Director, FBI

SS "WILSON B. KENNEDY"  
SS "WICKELBYER"  
SS "GRANDCAMP"

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947,  
Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
and Republic of France, Southern Texas,  
Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER  
(Department Files 61-17923, 61-17924, 61-18031)

Reference is made to your memorandum dated  
November 9, 1956, which requested, among other things,  
that efforts be made to determine whether five members  
of the crew of the "Grandcamp" are in the United  
States. The last known addresses for all these  
persons were in France.

The records of the Immigration and  
Naturalization Service (INS) reflect that Roger  
L'Abbe was listed as a steward on the SS "Liberte"  
when that vessel arrived in New York City on  
August 3, 1956. His residence was given as  
17 vis Rue de Phalsbourg, Le Havre, France, and  
his birth date as June 3, 1909.

INS records contain no information  
concerning the entry into the United States of  
Maurice L. Le Brozec or Guy Saucey since they  
were members of the crew of the "Grandcamp" on  
April 16, 1947. These records contain no  
information regarding Julian Gueril and Albert  
Dulong.

Efforts are being made in France to  
determine whether the above-mentioned persons  
are presently in the United States or whether  
they are employed aboard vessels which can be  
expected to call at U. S. ports. You will be  
advised of the results of such inquiry.

131-363

1 - Houston

See note on page 2.

JUP:igc

(5) SEE NOTE ON YELLOW ON PAGE 2

COMM-FBI  
DEC 7 - 1956  
MAILED 10

Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
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Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

Note SAC, Houston

Information contained herein has been furnished to the Legal Attache, Paris, for assistance in the investigation of this matter.

NOTE: Information from INS records was received 12/4/56 by Liaison Agent S. J. Fapich and set out in his memorandum 12/5/56 to Mr. R. R. Roach.

GIR 1

Legal Attache, Paris

December 7, 1953

Director, FBI (131-363)

SS "WILSON B. KEENE"  
SS "HIGFLYER"  
SS "GRANDCAMP"

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947,  
Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
and Republic of France, Southern Texas,  
Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

RECORDED - 26

INDEXED - 23

Rebulet 11/15/53.

For your assistance in this matter, you are advised that records of INS, Washington, D. C., reflect the following information regarding the five members of the crew of the SS "Grandcamp," whose names were listed on page 6 of the Departmental memorandum 11/3/53 requesting investigation in this matter:

Roger L'Abbe was a steward on the SS "Liberte" when that vessel arrived in New York City 3/3/50. His residence was 17 rue de Phalsbourg, Le Havre, France, and his birth date was reflected as 6/3/09, Le Havre, France.

Maurice L. Le Brozec was born 3/10/97 at Perros Turrac, France.

Cuy Saucey was born 8/13/23 at Calvados, France.

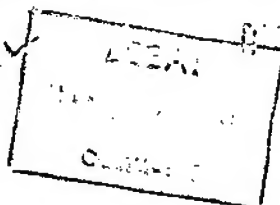
INS records contain no information concerning the entry into the United States of either Le Brozec or Saucey since they were members of the SS "Grandcamp" on April 16, 1947.

INS records were negative concerning Julian Gueril and Albert Dulong.

1 - Foreign Liaison Unit (route through for review)

JKP:ige  
(5)

Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
Rosen \_\_\_\_\_  
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Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_



## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : MR. R. R. ROACH

DATE: December 5, 1956

FROM : MR. S. J. PAPICH

SUBJECT: CREW MEMBERS OF  
SS "GRANDCAMP,"  
APRIL 16, 1947

Tolson	_____
Nichols	_____
Boardman	_____
Belmont	_____
Mason	_____
Mohr	_____
Parsons	_____
Rosen	_____
Tamm	_____
Nease	_____
Winterrowd	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Holloman	_____
Gandy	_____

Pursuant to a request received from the Investigative Division, the Liaison Agent checked with Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for the purpose of obtaining any available information concerning the present whereabouts of certain crew members of the captioned vessel which exploded and burned at Texas City, Texas, on April 16, 1947. On December 4, 1956, Joseph Staley, Intelligence Branch, INS, furnished the following information:

INS records reflect that Roger L'Abbe was listed as a steward on the SS "Liberte" when that vessel arrived in New York City on August 3, 1956. His residence was given as 17 vis. Rue de Phalsbourg, Le Havre, France, and his birth date as June 3, 1909, Le Havre, France.

INS records were negative concerning Julian Gueril and Albert Dulong.

INS records reflect that Maurice L. Le Brozec was born March 10, 1897, at Perros Turrac, France, and that Guy Saucey was born August 13, 1923, at Calvados, France. INS records do not contain any information concerning the entry into the United States of either of the two foregoing individuals since they were members of the SS "Grandcamp" on April 16, 1947.

ACTION:

The above information is being directed to the attention of the Investigative Division.

RECORDED - 76/31-313-6

INDEXED - 23

- 1 - Mr. Roach
- 1 - Mr. J. K. Ponder
- 1 - Liaison Section
- 1 - Mr. Papich

SJP:amk  
(5)

Let AAG Deal  
cc: Houston  
12-7-56 JKP:ige  
Let Agent, Paris  
12-8-56 JKP:ige

6-118

JJP

DECEMBER 28, 1956

AIRTEL

B  
O  
SAC, Houston

SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

Each office receiving this airtel should advise by return mail status of all investigation outstanding in this matter. Advice when reports completing investigation will reach Bureau.

Hoover

131-363

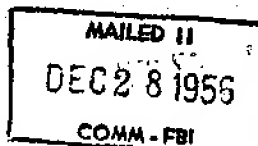
2 - Dallas  
2 - Legal Attache, Paris

1 - Foreign Liaison Unit (route through for review)

JKP:ige  
(9)

Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
Rosen \_\_\_\_\_  
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Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

EX-117



131-363-7  
10 JAN 21 1957

SAC, Houston (131-39)

January 9, 1957

Director, FBI (131-363) - 8

SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947  
Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and  
Republic of France  
Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Reurlet 12/31/56.

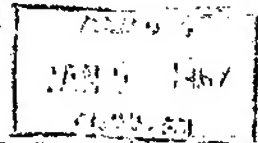
The contents of paragraph 1 on page 1 of relet were discussed with the Civil Division attorney handling this matter. After rechecking his file, the attorney advised that the Bureau has not interviewed J. G. Tompkins, James B. Pharr, and A. S. Gladwin, Jr., former officers of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company. Information available to the Department furnished by these persons was obtained from transcripts of hearings held in this matter and no signed statements have been taken from them.

Inasmuch as we have not previously taken signed statements from these three individuals, the Civil Division requests that they merely be interviewed for the purpose of obtaining the names, addresses, and official positions of any other persons who occupied positions of managerial authority over the vessels "Highflyer" and "Wilson B. Keene."

You are advised that the Civil Division is anxious to obtain the present addresses of the persons mentioned in Departmental memoranda dated November 9 and 26, 1956, inasmuch as the Department may be required to take depositions from certain of these persons before pretrial conferences are held. Pretrial conferences are expected to be held beginning in February, 1957. You should, therefore, expedite submission of a report completing all investigation in this matter.

NOTE: Information herein indicated as being received from the Civil Division was received 1/8/57 from Attorney Dale Green, Admiralty and Shipping Section, Civil Division.

JTG:ige  
(4)



Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
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Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_



## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI

4b FROM : SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

DATE: 12/31/56

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAME

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947  
Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and  
Republic of France  
Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Re letter from the Assistant Attorney General, Civil Division, to Director 11/9/56, Bureau letter to Houston 11/15/56, and Assistant Attorney General, Civil Division letter to Director 11/26/56.

Of the 19 individuals which the Department requested be located and interviewed in connection with the previous statements secured from them in 1948 the Houston Office to date has been unable to locate signed statements for seven of these individuals. Set forth below are details concerning these seven individuals:

1. Referenced Departmental letter dated November 9, 1956, Page 4, requests reinterview of J. G. TOMPKINS, - (20-65-1223) JAMES B. PHARR, and A. S. GLADWIN, Jr., all former officials of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and all having last known addresses in Galveston, Texas. The Houston Office is unable to locate any signed statements secured from these individuals and was unable to locate where interviews of these individuals were recorded.

2. The Department by memorandum dated November 9, and 26, 1956, requested a C. PETER SUDERMAN and Captain H. O. WEATHERBEE, both of Galveston, Texas, be reinterviewed in connection with the statement secured from them in 1948. The

- 2 - Bureau
- 2 - Dallas (Encl. 4) (RM)
- 2 - San Antonio (Encl. 4) (RM)
- 2 - Little Rock (Encl. 7) (RM)
- 1 - Houston

JJD:ys  
(9)

RECORDED-48

9

JAN 3

HO 131-39

Bureau's attention is directed to report of SA JAMES A. FINLEY entitled The Texas City Terminal Railway Company, United States, Civil Docket No. CA-535, U. S. District Court, Southern District of Texas, Federal Tort Claims Act dated April 24, 1948. On Pages 943 and 985 of that report the interviews of these two individuals were reported and a statement was made that no signed statement was obtained.

3. The Department by memorandums dated November 9 and 26, 1956, requested a reinterview of JOE CAMPOS MENDOZA, Arcadia, Texas, and JAMES CLOISE WOMACK, Murfreesboro, Arkansas. Review of the Houston records reflects that the original signed statement was given on hand receipt on December 16, 1948, at the U. S. Attorney's Office for both of these individuals. U. S. Attorney's Office subsequently transferred these records to the Judge Advocate General's Office, Galveston, Texas, without enumerating the items. Major CHARLES A. NYE, Judge Advocate General, Galveston, Texas, advised he has searched his records and cannot find statements obtained from these two individuals or other individuals listed under No. 1 and 2 above.

UACB the Houston Office and the Little Rock Office will interview JOE CAMPOS MENDOZA, C. PETER SUDERMAN and Captain H. O. WEATHERBEE, all believed located in Houston Division and JAMES CLOISE WOMACK, Little Rock Division, based on information previously reported by SA JAMES A. FINLEY, April 24, 1948.

The Bureau is requested to ascertain from the Department where the signed statements were recorded for A. S. GLADWIN, Jr., JAMES B. PHARR and J. G. TOMPKINS. It is requested that all offices covering leads in this matter set forth the original signed statements if available as obtained in 1948 and additional information obtained as a result of a reinterview inasmuch as both Houston and the Bureau are now carrying this matter in a different classification. It is also requested that the original signed statements be returned Registered Mail to the Houston Office with a report.

HO 131-39

The following enclosures are being sent to offices having leads in this matter to assist in the interviews:

To Dallas: Signed statement of PRESTON J. HASSELL dated March 20, 1948, and photostatic copies of Pages 625, 626 and 627 of report of SA JAMES C. FINLEY dated April 24, 1956, Houston, reporting interview of this individual.

To San Antonio: Signed statement of MAURICE S. PATTERSON dated March 18, 1948, Houston, and photostatic copies of Pages 827, 828, and 829, of report of SA JAMES A. FINLEY dated April 24, 1948, Houston, reflecting the interview of this individual.

To Little Rock: Signed statement of LEROY HASKELL WOMACK and photostatic copies of Pages 1015, 1016 and 1017 of report of SA JAMES A. FINLEY, April 24, 1948, Houston, reporting interview of this individual.

Also enclosed for Little Rock are Pages 1012, 1013 and 1014 of report of SA JAMES A. FINLEY, which reflect the interview of JAMES CLOISE WOMACK.

F B I

Date: 12/31/56

Transmit the following message via AIRTEL

AIRMAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Mr. Nease	_____
Tele. Rm.	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, DALLAS (131-7)

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
 SS HIGHFLYER  
 SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
 ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
 ADMIRALTY MATTER

*✓ P. J. H.*

Re Bureau airtel 12/28/56. Report reflecting investigation  
 Dallas Division will be submitted to reach Bureau, 1/8/57.

*(11-1  
5-1  
4-1)*

MURPHY

③ - Bureau  
 3 - Dallas  
 PMB:mfr  
 (6)

Mr. Rosen

RECORDED - 15

EX-121

*131-363-9*

*JH*

52 JAN 8 1957

Approved: *[Signature]*  
 Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

F B I

Date: 1/2/57

Transmit the following message via AIRTELAIRMAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI

FROM SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

RE: SS <sup>Q</sup>WILSON B. KEENE  
 SS "HIGHFLYER"  
 SS "GRANDCAMP", ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Tele. Rm.	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

Re Bureau airtel to Houston, 12/28/56, and Houston letter to Bureau, 12/31/56.

For the information of the Little Rock and San Antonio Offices, referenced Bureau airtel requested each office receiving a copy of that airtel to advise by return mail the status of all investigation outstanding in this matter and when a report will reach the Bureau.

The Little Rock Office has two individuals to be interviewed in this matter, JAMES CLOISE WOMACK and LEROY HASKELL WOMACK, last known address of both was Murfreesboro, Arkansas.

The Little Rock Office has advised that JAMES CLOISE WOMACK has moved to Dallas, Texas. As soon as the Little Rock Office obtains the Dallas address of this individual, it will be forwarded to Dallas in order that they may interview him.

The San Antonio Office had one interview of MAURICE S. PATTERSON, Holland, Texas; that office has informed that he has been located in Temple, Texas, and the original signed statement, together with photostatic copies of the pertinent pages of the report of SA JAMES A. FINLEY, 4/24/48, Houston, reflecting interview of this individual, had been forwarded to San Antonio in order that he might be interviewed.

3-Bureau (AM)

2-Dallas (AM)

2-Little Rock (131-7) (AM)

2-San Antonio (131-5) (AM)

1-Houston

JJD: krs

(10)

RECORDED - 54  
 Mr. Rosen

131-363-10

EX-117 12 JAN 4 1957

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_

M

Per \_\_\_\_\_

JAN 10 1957

F B I

Date: 1/2/57

Transmit the following message via AIRTELAIRMAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

The Dallas Office has one interview of PRESTON J. HASSELL, last known address Jacksonville, Texas, and had been supplied with the signed statement furnished by this individual in 1948. In addition, the Dallas Office has been asked to ascertain the present address and employment of ERNEST TILLMAN GLOVER, last known address Route 4, Troup, Texas, but not to interview him.

The foregoing information has been set out for the Bureau's information.

It is estimated that the investigation in the Houston Division will be completed by January 11, 1957, and a report will be submitted by January 21, 1957.

BURTON

*See Dallas  
Call for  
Advised 1/12/57  
JH*

F B I

Date: 1/3/57

Transmit the following message via AIRTELAIRMAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363) *put*

FROM: SAC, DALLAS (131-7)

SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS<sup>o</sup> HIGHFLYERSS<sup>o</sup> GRANDCAMPLimitation of Liability, April 16, 17, 1947Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Co. and  
Republic of FranceSouthern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
Admiralty Matters

Re Bulet to Houston, 11/15/56.

Inquiries at Troup, Texas, to locate ERNEST TILLMAN GLOVER, whose former address was Route 4, Troup, have proved negative.

[redacted] who has [redacted] years, advised on 11/26/56 that GLOVER is not at, and to the best of their knowledge, has never received mail through the Troup Post Office, unless it was in care of some other party.

The Retail Merchants Credit Bureau has no record of this man.

[redacted] suggests that with some background information regarding Mr. GLOVER, such as his race, age and names of relatives or friends, he may have resided with in this area, he might be able to furnish some information regarding his whereabouts.

The Dallas files are negative as to GLOVER. It is suggested that HOUSTON check its files, and if background information regarding GLOVER is available, that it be furnished to Dallas.

- (3) - Bureau  
 2 - Houston  
 1 - Dallas (131-7)  
 CLP:hmd  
 (6) (rd)

RECORDED - 54

131-363-11

Mr. Tolson	
Mr. Nichols	
Mr. Boardman	
Mr. Belmont	
Mr. Mohr	
Mr. Parsons	
Mr. Rosen	
Mr. Tamm	
Mr. Trotter	
Mr. Nease	
Tele. Room	
Mr. Holloman	
Miss Gandy	

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

67 JAN 10 1957

# Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM : SAC, DALLAS (131-7)

SUBJECT: SS. WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

DATE: 1/7/57

Reference is made to Houston letter to Little Rock, 12/7/56, enclosing copies of a letter from GEORGE COCHRAN DOUB, Assistant Attorney General to the Director, 11/26/56.

Inquiries on 1/3/57 by SA CURTIS L. PERRYMAN at Jacksonville, Texas, to locate PRESTON J. HASSELL, were negative.

[redacted] advised that his records do not reflect that this man is now, or has in the past, received mail at Jacksonville. He contacted the Rural Carrier for Route No. 4 and advised that PRESTON J. HASSELL is unknown to the carrier. He advised that a FRANK E. HASSELL, who is an elderly man, lived on Route No. 4 for many years.

b6  
b7C  
b7D

Mr. and Mrs. FRANK E. HASSELL, who presently reside at 611 Sunset Street, Jacksonville, Texas, advised that they had lived on Route No. 4 for over 30 years. They knew of no one named PRESTON J. HASSELL and advised that if this man had lived in the area any length of time, they feel that they would have known or recalled him.

Mr. LEALON HASSELL, UNITED GAS CO., Jacksonville, Texas, advised that he knows of no one named PRESTON J. HASSELL, and that as far as he knows, he and FRANK E. HASSELL, and their respective families (who are not related), are the only people by that name in the community.

Mrs. JACK CULLISON, Retail Merchants Credit Bureau, advised that she has no record of a PRESTON J. HASSELL having resided in Jacksonville or vicinity. She advised that a person named [redacted] had, in 1955, lived on [redacted] Palestine, Texas, near the community of Neches, Texas. This man moved to Morgan City, Louisiana, in September, 1955, leaving a series of uncollected debts, and that his creditors had been

b6  
b7C

2 - Bureau (131-363)  
2 - Houston (131-39)  
1 - Dallas (131-7)

CLP:hmd  
(5) (rd)

AIR MAIL

RECORDED-3

INDEXED-3

1-1-21-1-12

100

50 JAN 11 1957



DL 131-7

unsuccessful in locating him. She did not know whether this man was identical with PRESTON J. HASSELL.

The HOUSTON Division is requested to review its files for background information regarding PRESTON J. HASSELL, and in the event additional inquiries to locate this man are indicated will furnish descriptive data including names and addresses of relatives or employers who might assist in locating this person.

FBI

Date: 1/5/57

GIR 8

Transmit the following message via AIRTEL  
AIRMAIL  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI ATTENTION: IDENTIFICATION DIV

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOE. 1858, 1859, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

Mr. Tolson	
Mr. Nichols	
Mr. Boardman	
Mr. Belmont	
Mr. Mohr	
Mr. Parsons	
Mr. Rosen	
Mr. Tamm	
Mr. Trotter	
Mr. Tele. Rm.	
Mr. Holloman	
Miss Gandy	

JOE CAMPOS MENDOZA, Arcadia, Texas, who was formerly a longshoreman with [redacted] during the Texas City disaster, advised it is his understanding that [redacted] is presently in a penitentiary for some offense which happened two or three years ago. Galveston PD records [redacted] reflect his PD Number to be [redacted] arrested January 24, 1953, DWI, paid \$134.00 fine on 6/12/53.

Identification Division requested to search [redacted] and Galveston PD Number and forward record to Houston as [redacted] needed for interview instant case.

BURTON

- 3 - Bureau (AM)
- 1 - Houston

JJD:mth  
(4)

Mr. Trotter

Mr. Rosen

RECORDED  
INDEXED  
JAN 7 1957  
131-39-13

ONE

Approved: [Signature] Special Agent in Charge

Sent M Per

b6  
b7c



THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Embassy  
Paris 8, France

GIR

Date: January 4, 1957  
To: Director, FBI (131-363)  
From: Legal Attache, Paris (62-10)  
Subject: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

ReBuairtel 12/28/56.

[redacted] advised that the requested inquiry is in progress and that every effort to expedite this case will be made. He did not know when it would be completed but hoped to have it shortly.

b6  
b7C  
b7D

Upon receipt of information from [redacted]  
[redacted] the Bureau will be immediately advised.

This matter is being followed closely.

ETB:AL

RECORDED - 58

131-10-14



F B I

Date:

Transmit the following message via \_\_\_\_\_

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*(Priority or Method of Mailing)*

HO 131-39

as the Department may be required to take depositions from certain of these persons before pre-trial conferences are held. Pre-trial conferences are expected to begin in February, 1957. You should therefore expedite submission of report completing all investigation in this matter.

It is requested that New Orleans set out enclosed signed statement in their report and return statement, registered mail, to Houston, along with other items enclosed herewith, upon completion of investigation.

BURTON

FBI

Date: 1/14/57

Transmit the following message via

AIRTEL

AIR MAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and  
Republic of FranceSouthern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Telfer	_____
Mr. Sizoo	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

*[Handwritten signature]*

It is requested that the Baltimore Office contact Lt. Col. THOMAS C. MARMAN, Chief, Texas City Claims Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, Department of the Army, Fort Holabird, Baltimore, Maryland, to ascertain the most recent known address and/or employment of the following individuals:

1. PRESTON J. HASSELL  
Last known address, Route 4, Jacksonville, Texas.  
This individual was interviewed 3/20/48 at Palestine, Texas, is a white male, married, and of middle age.  
It appears that from the records of the Judge Advocate General's office, Galveston, Texas, this man was a claimant in the Texas City case.
2. ERNEST TILLMAN GLOVER  
Last known address, Route 4, Troup, Texas.  
This man was interviewed on 3/25/48 at Jacksonville, Texas, where it was recorded he was a white male, 21 years of age, single, with a 4th grade education. He was then employed as a mechanic for Gore Bros. Garage, Jacksonville, Texas. He was not injured in the Texas City blast. Father is W. R. GLOVER, Rt. 5, Troup, Texas.

- 3 - Bureau (AM)  
2 - Baltimore (AM)  
2 - Dallas (131-7) (AM)  
1 - Houston

JJD:bjc  
(8)

Mr. Rosen

RECORDED - 17

131-363-16

JAN 18 1957

Approved: *[Signature]*  
Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

67 JAN 22 1957

F B I

Date:

Transmit the following message via \_\_\_\_\_

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(Priority or Method of Mailing)

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HO 131-39

3. WILLIAM KEETON THOMAS  
Last known address, 2417 Fourth Avenue North,  
Texas City, Texas.  
This individual was interviewed on 3/6/48 at  
Texas City, Texas, and it was recorded that he was  
27 years of age. He is a white male and was em-  
ployed as a longshoreman at the time of the Texas  
City blast.

These individuals are necessary witnesses in the  
above styled case and it is requested that any information in  
the Judge Advocate General's office be forwarded to Houston  
as soon as possible in order that these individuals may be  
located and interviewed. The Bureau has advised that it may  
be necessary for the Department to take depositions from  
some of these individuals after they are located prior to  
pre-trial conferences starting in February, 1957.

Dallas will attempt to locate GLOVER and HASSELL,  
based on this information taken from the indices of the Hous-  
ton Office.

BURTON

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

F B I

Date: 1/15/57

Transmit the following message via AIR TELAIR MAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

7)  
FROM: SAC, SAN ANTONIO (131-5)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMPLimitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947  
Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and  
Republic of France  
Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Winterrowd	_____
Tele. Rm.	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

Re Airtel from Houston to Bureau 1/2/57.

MAURICE S. PATTERSON, who was employed as Longshoreman during the loading of the SS Grandcamp when the disaster occurred, has been located at Temple, Texas. Results of interview with him will be submitted in report to reach the Bureau by 1/18/57.

END

WERNER

3 - Bureau (AM)  
1 - SA  
OLG:bmb  
(4)

RECORDED - 8

Mr. Rosen

131-363-17  
20 JAN 16 1957Approved: *Sgw*

Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

67 JAN 22 1957



1/17/57

AIRTEL

RECORDED - 28

131-363-18  
SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

EX-125

SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947  
Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and  
Republic of France  
Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Reurairtel 1/15/57.

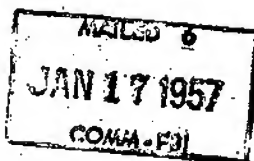
Determine present addresses of the three  
officers or employees of Lykes Brothers identified  
in the Departmental memorandum. If they are  
presently employed by Lykes Brothers, do not  
interview them but furnish their addresses in  
your report. Interview any who are no longer  
employed by Lykes Brothers.

HOOVER

131-363

NOTE: Question presented in reairtel discussed 1/17/57  
with Dale Green, Attorney, Admiralty and Shipping  
Section, Civil Division, who furnished above advice.

JKP:ige  
(4)



Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
Rosen \_\_\_\_\_  
Tamm \_\_\_\_\_  
Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

F128  
50 JAN 23 1957

RECEIVED  
JAN 17 1957

RECEIVED  
JAN 17 1957

F B I

Date: 1/15/57

Transmit the following message via AIRTELAIR MAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and  
Republic of France

Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Rebulet to Houston, 1/9/57.

THOMAS McKAY, General Delivery, Alvin, Texas, advised his nephew married the former wife of CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR and that CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR presently operates the Bluebonnet Inn, a cafe, approximately eight miles out of Temple on the Temple-Waco Road.

DALLAS should verify DANNAR's residence and employment and advise Bureau in order that Department may be advised as requested in Departmental Memorandum dated 11/9/56, Page 6. Also, if possible, ascertain the residence and employment of EARL EVERETT DANNAR, son of CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR.

The Bureau's attention is called to the appropriate section of the Manual of Instructions concerning Admiralty Matters wherein it is necessary to obtain permission of the attorneys for the interested parties prior to interviewing any officers or employees of that company. It should be noted that J. G. TOMPKINS is presently the Vice-president of Lykes Bros., who is a petitioner in this matter. Bureau's attention is also called to the fact that it has not been stated in any of the Departmental memoranda that the permission of the Lykes Bros. attorney has been obtained for this interview.

- 3 - Bureau (AM)
- 2 - Dallas (131-7) (AM)
- 1 - Houston

JJD:bjc  
(6)

Mr. Rosen

Approved: [Signature]  
Special Agent in ChargeSent 1/16/57 Per [Signature]

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Casper	_____
Mr. Callahan	_____
Mr. Conrad	_____
Mr. DeLoach	_____
Mr. Evans	_____
Mr. Gale	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Sullivan	_____
Mr. Tavel	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

RECORDED - 28

20 JAN 16 1957

F B I

Date:

Transmit the following message via \_\_\_\_\_

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

The Bureau is requested to advise Houston whether or not such permission is necessary or has been obtained in order that Houston may interview these individuals on 1/22/57.

BURTON

1/17  
Dale Green  
Adm. + Shipping Dept.  
Says don't int.  
Pres. single on off  
J. Lykes Buss.  
HHP

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Form No. 1

THIS CASE ORIGINATED AT

**HOUSTON**

FILE NO.

<b>REPORT MADE AT</b> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SAN ANTONIO</b></p>	<b>DATE WHEN MADE</b> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1/17/57</b></p>	<b>PERIOD FOR WHICH MADE</b> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>12/17/56; 1/8, 11, 15/57</b></p>	<b>REPORT MADE BY</b> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>O. LEE GOLDEN qt</b></p>
<b>TITLE</b> <p><b>SS WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIGHFLYER; SS GRANDCAMP</b>          Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France, Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos.</p>			<b>CHARACTER OF CASE</b> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b></p>
<b>SYNOPSIS OF FACTS: 1868, 1869, 1870.</b>  <p><b>MAHRICE S. PATTERSON, 902 N. 2nd St., Temple, Texas, who was employed as extra longshoreman for Suderman Stevedoring Co., Texas City, Texas, at time of Texas City disaster, verified accuracy of statement he furnished on 3/18/48. PATTERSON will testify he had not loaded ammonium nitrate on other French vessels before job aboard SS GRANDCAMP; that details of loading controlled and directed by his foreman, LEONARD BOSWELL, and not by crew of vessel. He recalled BOSWELL issued instructions concerning regulations which prohibited smoking aboard the ship; that he did not observe any smoking in vicinity of Hatch No. 4 of the GRANDCAMP while he worked on 4/15/47. PATTERSON advised neither members of French crew nor his foreman warned him concerning burning or explosive nature of ammonium nitrate fertilizer.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>- RUC -</b></p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><i>1 cc Dist. J. Lee</i>  <i>Encl. Dist. J. Lee</i>  <i>1-17-57 JLP</i></p> </div>			
<b>APPROVED AND FORWARDED:</b> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><i>S. J. Lee</i>  <i>S. J. Lee</i></p> </div>		<b>SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE</b> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><i>S. J. Lee</i>  <i>S. J. Lee</i></p> </div>	
<b>COPIES OF THIS REPORT</b> <p><b>2 - Bureau (AM)</b>  <b>3 - Houston (Enc. 1) (RM)</b>  <b>1 - San Antonio (131-5)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <i>20 JAN 20 1957</i> </p>		<b>DO NOT WRITE IN THESE SPACES</b> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><i>1-17-57</i>      <i>19-1-1957</i></p> <p><i>6 JAN 15 1957</i></p> <p><i>7-1-1957</i>      <i>11-1-1957</i></p> </div>	

PROPERTY OF FBI—THIS CONFIDENTIAL REPORT AND ITS CONTENTS ARE LOANED TO YOU BY THE FBI AND ARE NOT TO BE DISTRIBUTED OUTSIDE OF AGENCY TO WHICH LOANED.

SA 131-5

DETAILS:

AT TEMPLE, TEXAS

MAURICE S. PATTERSON, 902 Second Street, who is employed as auto mechanic for May and Halford Motor Company, 215 North Main Street, informed on January 11, 1957 and January 15, 1957, that on April 16, 1947, he was employed as extra longshoreman for Suderman Stevedoring Company at Texas City, Texas. Prior to the occurrence of the disaster, he had been loading ammonium nitrate in No. 4 hatch of the SS GRANDCAMP. The foreman of his gang was LEONARD BOSWELL from whom he took instructions. PATTERSON reviewed a signed statement taken from him at Holland, Texas, on March 18, 1948, by Special Agent NORVAL D. WILLS of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and verified the accuracy of this statement which follows:

"Holland, Texas  
March 18, 1948

"I, MAURICE S. PATTERSON, Route 1, Holland, Texas, do make this voluntary statement to Special Agent NORVAL D. WILLS of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and know it may be used in Court.

"I worked as an extra longshoreman at Texas City, Texas, for about six months. I worked for anybody that needed an extra hand.

"I believe I worked four days on the GRANDCAMP as a longshoreman for SUDERMAN. The only day I worked in a hold on the GRAND CAMP was April 15, 1947. On this day our gang worked in the #4 hatch loading ammonium nitrate in the lower hold. Our foreman was BOSWELL. I worked on the off shore side. There were two trays working all the time. By this I mean the hoist would drop a loaded tray and then pick up an empty tray. This would some

SA 131-5

"of the men unoccupied for about 3 minutes.

"None of the Ammonium Nitrate I handled in hatch 4 was hot and none seemed to be damp. I did not lay dunnage in Hatch 4 but from the top of the hatch I saw the men lay it. So far as I could see, the bottom of the boat was about as clean as any; there was not any trash like paper scraps or wood. Heavy brown paper was laid over the dunnage before we started loading.

"The one day I worked in hatch 4 of the GRAND CAMP I did not see anyone smoking. I have been on one boat where the men smoked in hold and that was on a boat hauling sand.

"When we quit work on April 15, 1947 around 5 o'clock everything in hatch 4 was in good order. There was no indication of fire or anything else so far as I know.

"The following day 4/16/47 I believe I reported for work at 7 o'clock. I first went into the hold of hatch 4 on the GRAND CAMP but BOSWELL called me out after a minute or two. He told me they were short-handed inside the warehouse, the first warehouse where the amonium nitrate was stored that was being put on the GRAND CAMP. When I came up from hatch 4, there were no signs of fire. I did not see any smoking in the hold while I was there. All the men in the gang were present when the hatch was uncovered.

"I went into the warehouse shortly after 7 o'clock. I remained there loading trays until BOSWELL told us to come on board as there was a fire on the ship. I had not seen smoke up to this time. When I went on board the ship, I believe the smoke was orange color. Smoke was coming only from hatch 4. There was just a small bit of smoke.

SA 131-5

(signed statement by PATTERSON continued)

"The men were still in the hatch and when I looked in the hatch I could see a small flame at the bottom of the ship about half way to the in-shore side. The men in the hold were throwing bags of ammonium nitrate out of the way trying to get to the fire. Some members of the GRAND CAMP crew were in the hold with fire extinguishers. The flame got bigger and I don't know if ammonium nitrate or dunnage was burning. I do not know what kind of wood was used for dunnage. I do not know what kind of smell the smoke had; it was not the smell of burning paper or wood. Part of our gang got a 2 inch hose and put into the hold but no water was turned on because PETE SADERMAN said it would damage the cargo and they had better use steam. I heard SUDERMAN tell BOSWELL to tell the gang to come up from the hold. BOSWELL relayed the message and the gang came up. There was some trouble in getting the Frenchman out of the hold but after they came up, we secured the hatch. The gang working hatch 1, the only other gang on the boat, also secured their hatch.

"The French crew turned the steam on while we were still aboard the ship.

"After securing the hatch we were given orders to stand by. I do not know what time this was. As my automobile was on the lot just across the road from the warehouse, I went to move it. I parked the car about 2 blocks away. I did this because of the fire. On returning to the docks and when I had gotten to the molasses tank the explosion occurred. I saw it; everything just seemed black from smoke. I was hit in the back and shoulder, right, by a piece of metal. I could still walk. I got up and walked to my car, which was damaged but would still run. I went to a first aid station at Danforth's clinic. No bones were broken but I was bruised. I was at the clinic within half an hour after the explosion. I actually heard two explosions, one right after the other.

SA 131-5

(signed statement by PATTERSON continued)

"I have worked with ammonium nitrate both as a warehouseman and a long-shoreman at the Texas City Terminal Railway docks. No one has ever given me any instructions how to handle ammonium nitrate. No one ever told me it was dangerous, that it would explode or burn. No special precautions were taken in handling ammonium nitrate. We handled it like we do flour. When a bag tore, the spilled ammonium nitrate would be picked up and re-bagged. The sweeper would tend to this. There were no signs of caution at the warehouse concerning ammonium nitrate; the only signs were "no smoking" but these signs referred generally to the warehouse. There were no marks of caution on the bags. The bags were stamped. "Ammonium nitrate fertilizer". I do not recall any other writing on the bags. The bags of fertilizer that I unloaded from boxcars into the warehouse were not warm.

"Up to the time of the explosion I did not see any fire except on the GRAND CAMP. None of the warehouses were burning.

"I have read this 5 page statement and it is true.

/s/"MAURICE S. PATTERSON

"Witness:

/s/"NORVAL D. WILLS, S. A.,  
F. B. I., Houston, Tex."

This signed statement is being returned to the Houston Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In addition to this statement, PATTERSON informed that he presently is the father of seven children; that although he received injuries during the explosion at



SA 131-5

Texas City, Texas, on April 16, 1947, he has not filed a claim against the Government and has not sought compensation for personal injuries because he has been without funds to hire an Attorney.

PATTERSON will testify that he had not loaded ammonium nitrate on other French vessels before being assigned that job aboard the SS GRANDCAMP; that during the loading of the ammonium nitrate aboard the SS GRANDCAMP, the details of the loading were controlled and directed by his foreman, LEONARD BOSWELL, and not by the crew of the vessel. He recalled that BOSWELL had issued instructions concerning regulations which prohibited smoking aboard the ship; that he understood that smoking was not permitted by either the crew or longshoremen while aboard ship. Neither members of the French crew nor BOSWELL, his foreman, had ever warned him concerning the burning or explosive nature of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, and he had no knowledge that ammonium nitrate would either burn or explode until he saw a fire in Hatch No. 4 of the SS GRANDCAMP on the morning of April 16, 1947, just prior to the explosions. He related that members of the French crew were not seen by him aboard ship until the fire was discovered, at which time both the crew and longshoremen attempted to extinguish the blaze by the use of steam instead of water. He was questioned concerning whether he observed either the French crew or longshoremen smoking topside, but advised that so much time had elapsed that he could not recall the answer to this question. He stated that members of the French crew made no effort in his presence to issue instructions concerning the proper loading of this ship.

PATTERSON advised that he worked on April 15, 1947, loading this ship and did not observe any smoking in the vicinity of Hatch No. 4 of the GRANDCAMP. He related that the sacks of ammonium nitrate fertilizer were stacked in split rows, which, in his opinion, would prevent a cigarette or match from falling into the bottom of the cargo.

SA 131-5

PATTERSON is a whiteman, thirty-two years of age, married, and has a high school education. He formerly farmed with his father-in-law, FRITZ WERDLE, at Holland, Texas. During recent years, he has been employed as an automobile or truck mechanic in the vicinity of Temple. The only insurance benefits he received after the Texas City disaster was payment of \$650.00, which was from an insurance company for damage to his automobile.

ENCLOSURE: TO HOUSTON:

(1) Signed statement of MAURICE S. PATTERSON,  
which was taken at Holland, Texas, on 3/18/48.

- RUC -

SA 131-5

ADMINISTRATIVE

Efforts were made to locate MAURICE S. PATTERSON at Holland, Texas, on 12/17/56, at which time it was determined that he was residing at Temple, Texas, and was employed by Mid-Tex Equipment Company as a Truck Mechanic. The Houston Office was requested to furnish the signed statement executed by PATTERSON in 1948 in order that he could verify its contents. After the receipt of this signed statement, efforts were made to locate PATTERSON on 1/8/57, but he was not located until 1/11/57.

Three copies of this report are being designated for the Houston Office in order that one copy may be furnished to the United States Attorney at Houston in the event such procedure is being followed in this case.

REFERENCE

Memorandum from Houston to Little Rock, 12/7/56.

Memorandum from Houston to Bureau, 12/31/56.

Airtel from San Antonio to Bureau, 1/15/57.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

F B I

Date: 1/18/57

Transmit the following message via AIRTELAIR MAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

Mr. Tolson	
Mr. Nichols	
Mr. Boardman	
Mr. Belmont	
Mr. Mohr	
Mr. Parsons	
Mr. Rosen	
Mr. Tamm	
Mr. Winterrowd	
Tele. Room	
Mr. Holloman	
Miss Gandy	

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and

Republic of France

Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTERS

ReHOairtel to Director, 1/2/57.

Referenced airtel advised investigation to be completed by 1/11/57 and report submitted by 1/21/57. All investigation has been completed with the exception of interview of three Lykes Bros. employees and officials and the location and interview of one longshoreman.

A report in this matter has been dictated in part. The Agent to whom this case is assigned was unable to complete dictation due to illness and the fact that he has been under subpoena in an extortion matter in Houston during this past week and is under subpoena for 1/21/57 for an FRA trial in Galveston, Texas, which trial will probably take three days.

Every effort will be made to complete this report as soon as possible and to complete the remainder of the investigation.

BURTON

3 - Bureau (AM)  
1 - Houston

Mr. Rosen

JJD:bjc  
(4)

JAN 23 1957

Approved: Leo Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

50 JAN 23 1957

F B I

Date: 1/16/57

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Mr. Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

Transmit the following message via AIRTELAIR MAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, DALLAS (131-7)

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Co. and  
Republic of FranceSouthern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Re Houston airtel to Bureau, 1/15/57, which sets forth lead at Bluebonnet Inn, a cafe located approximately 8 miles out of Temple on the Temple-Waco Road.

As Temple and Waco are located within the San Antonio Division, 1 copy of referenced airtel is enclosed to San Antonio for handling of above lead.

MURPHY

- ③ - Bureau AM  
 2 - San Antonio (131-5) (Encl. 1)  
 1 - Houston (131-39)(info)  
 1 - Dallas  
 PMB:mfr  
 (7)

Mr. Rosen

RECORDED - 24

131-312-24

EX-125

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : SAC, <sup>LEGAT,</sup> PARIS (Your file 62-10) DATE: 2-8-57

FROM : Director, FBI (Bufile &amp; serial 131-363-22)

SS WILSON B. KEENE, ETC.

SUBJECT:

ADMIRALTY MATTER

Office of Origin: Ho

1. ( ) The deadline in this case has passed and the Bureau has not received a report. You are instructed to submit a report immediately. In the event a report has been submitted, you should make a notation of the date on which it was submitted on this letter and return it to the Bureau, Room # 4714.

Report submitted Jan 31 1957

Report will be submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for delay See previous letterRewlet 1-4-57

2. (✓) Advise Bureau re status of this case.
3. (✓) Advise Bureau when report may be expected.
4. ( ) Surep immediately.

(Place your reply on this form and return to the Bureau. Note on the top serial in the case file the receipt and acknowledgment of this communication.)

F B I

Date: 1/24/57

Transmit the following message via

AIRTEL

AIR MAIL

(Priority or Method of Mailing)

DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and

Republic of France

Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTERS

EARL EVERETT DANNAR telephonically contacted Houston Office and advised his father operates Bluebonnet Tavern on Temple-Waco Road and receives his mail at General Delivery, Eddy, Texas, or General Delivery, Troy, Texas. It should be noted this lead was previously set out based on information supplied by another relative which stated that CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR operated this tavern approximately eight miles north of Temple.

SAN ANTONIO conduct investigation as requested in Departmental memorandum dated 11/9/56.

Investigation Judge Advocate General's Office, Galveston, Texas, reflects JAMES B. PHARR gave that office an address of c/o D. W. PHARR, 4107 Barry Knoll Drive, Los Angeles 65, California.

For info LOS ANGELES, there are enclosed one copy each Departmental memorandum dated 11/9/56 and 11/26/56. The former communication, Page 4, requests this man be interviewed; however, subsequent Bureau instructions advised if the man is employed by Lykes Bros. Steamship Company we should ascertain only present address and employment and furnish same in report. If it is determined he is not employed by that company,

- 3 - Bureau (AM)
- 2 - San Antonio (131-5) (AM)
- 2 - Los Angeles (Encls-2) (AM)
- 1 - Houston

RECORDED - 4

JJD:bjc  
(8)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Agent in Charge

Mr. Rosen

Sent \_\_\_\_\_

M

Per \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Mr. Nease	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

0-1-100, BA.  
SA, LA + Legat.  
Paris 34  
2-8-57  
gkp/26

F B I

Date:

Transmit the following message via \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

he should be interviewed to ascertain the names, addresses, and official positions of other individuals who occupied positions of managerial authority over the vessels HIGHFLYER and WILSON B. KEENE.

Civil Division is anxious to obtain the present addresses of persons mentioned in these Departmental memoranda inasmuch as it may be required to take depositions from certain of these persons for pre-trial conferences which are expected to be held in February, 1957.

Therefore, expedite submission of your reports in this matter.

BURTON

*cc Mr. Ponder*

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge



GIR 1

## FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

REPORTING OFFICE NEW ORLEANS	OFFICE OF ORIGIN HOUSTON	DATE 1/30/57	INVESTIGATIVE PERIOD 1/23,24/57
TITLE OF CASE SS WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIGHFLYER; SS GRANDCAMP; Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947; Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France; Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870		REPORT MADE BY CHARLES R. CARSON	TYPED BY cjk
		CHARACTER OF CASE ADMIRALTY MATTERS	

## SYNOPSIS:

MARVIN R. SPENCER reviewed his statement given 3/9/48, stating there were regulations against smoking in French ships loading nitrate but no specific orders given by crew or foreman of loading crew. There was smoking in hold of SS Grandcamp. Burning cigarettes often extinguished by pushing them in loose fertilizer. SPENCER loaded nitrate Texas City, Tex. about two years, mostly on French ships; remembers no "No Smoking" signs on Grandcamp and no special effort made to prevent smoking.

-RUC-

DETAILS: AT NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

On January 24, 1957, MARVIN R. SPENCER was located on the east bank of the Harvey Canal, where he is a subcontractor sandblasting and painting converted landing craft for the Shell Oil Company. His residence is 531 Second Street, Harvey, and his telephone number is FIlmore 1-4032. If he is not located there he can be located through the Lone Star Tank Painting Company, 2110 Fourth Avenue, North, Texas City, Texas.

APPROVED <i>[Signature]</i>	SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACES BELOW	
COPIES MADE: 2 - Bureau (131-363) 2 - Houston (131-39) (Encl. 3) (RM) 1 - New Orleans (131-65)		131-363-23	RECORDED - 23
		FEB 1 1957	
			EX-125

NO 131-65

Mr. SPENCER was shown the following signed statement which he reviewed in Agent's presence and advised the information contained in it is correct and still fresh in his memory:

"Texas City, Texas.  
March 9, 1948.

"I, Marvin R. Spencer, make this statement to Roy T. Noonan, and Leo K. Cook, Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I am 26 years of age and my address is Box 427, Texas City. I have been doing long-shoreman work for about four years off and on.

"I worked on the Grand Camp starting on Saturday the 12th of April, 1947, and worked the day shift that day and the next day, Sunday, although we just got there to work Sunday when it rained. Then Sunday night, the 13th, I worked the night shift on the High Flyer which was behind the Grand Camp on Pier O, and we finished the High Flyer that night and it moved to Pier A. Then Monday night I worked all night on the Grand Camp, Clarence Danner being the foreman. Tuesday night I did not work but was going to report again Wednesday night for work. At the same time I was working at the Sid Richardson Refinery and was there on the job Wed. morning the 16th of April when the explosion occurred.

"I have helped load some seventy-five boats with this material out of the port at Texas City. This is sometimes called Fertilizer and sometimes it is referred to as "Nitrate".

"In loading the Grand Camp and the High Flyer the same procedure was used and the loading was done in much the same manner as the other boats I have worked on. Only the crew of the Grand Camp was different. The members of the crew were around a lot more than they had been on other ships, and they would seem to be watching every move that we made during the day shifts at least. While working Monday night, the 14th of April, with Earl Danner and Leroy Galloway, one of the crew members made us take our clothes off of the number two deck where we had hung them when we went to work. He told us not

to come up there again. Later I got a hat full of peanuts and took them down to the others and then he really made a fuss and was giving orders in half English and half France. He could talk English alright as he gave the first orders in English. Our curiosity had been aroused so later Leroy Galloway and I went up to see what was in the number two deck. Also I might say that some of the binder twin that was loaded on the number two deck stuck out over the hatchway so that once in a while a tray would hit a sack of binder twin and a sack of fertilizer would get knocked off and would fall in the hold and make it messy as these sacks would break up when they hit. When Leroy and I went up to the number two deck we found that there were many boxes of small ammunition about 30 calibre, as some of it was broken so that the ammunition could be seen. I would say that there were several of these boxes containing this ammunition, and about one-third of the corner of number two deck back of the peanuts had these boxes. There were several large boxes, between fifty and seventy five, which were about three feet long and about eighteen inches wide. We tried to get one of these open but they had steel straps around them. I could not read what was on them as it was not very light. However these boxes were similar to boxes of 57 millimeter ammunition that I have seen and handled during the three years I was in the army and that is what I thought it was. It was after looking this over that I brought down the hat full of peanuts and the crew member who said he would have us barred from the ship if we went up there again did not see us back in there looking this over.

"As to the smoking regulations there were regulations against smoking that most everyone knew. However there were no specific orders given by either foreman, Dannar or Boswell, that I heard, about smoking on this ship. But the men did smoke and they were smoking in hatch number two Monday night. At least six of the eight men in there were smoking, and this was done when they would be waiting for a tray to be lowered. On this night in number two hold one of the men, Leroy Galloway, now dead, layed a cigarette down on some of the sacks and when the tray came down he jumped up quickly and accidentally knocked the cigarette down a crack between the sacks. It seemed to start a small fire which smoked for about five minutes. We did not put any sacks on this spot until it stopped smoking. One of the men raked up a couple of handfuls of the loose fertilizer and put it

NO 131-65

down in the crack where the cigarette was and said he would smother the fire out that way. Three of the crew that saw that are still living, and in addition to myself they are Earl Danner and another whose name I can not recall but he is still around. I think that was E. R. Young.

"I have heard Boswell get tough with the men when he would find them smoking. There was smoking among the day crew in the hold, and I know that at least two on each side of the hold were smoking, this being in number four hatch. This is the usual practice on the boats that I have worked on. I have seen men put cigarettes out by ducking them in a handful of this fertilizer of nitrate. This would be done if Boswell or other foremen were coming. I have also seen the men smoking in the warehouse and they would do so whenever they got a chance. They have to be more careful in there and they would often put the cigarettes out by ducking them in the fertilizer.

"I have read this statement, two typewritten pages, and have signed both pages.

"/s/ MARVIN R. SPENCER

Mr. SPENCER said that he worked for about two years in Texas City loading nitrates on ships and probably two-thirds of the ships he worked on were French. The only control the crews exercised in this loading operation was to make sure that the hold was fully loaded and that the stevedores did not leave any empty corners because of the distance they would have to carry the sacks. On some occasions the crew members would caution one of the stevedore bosses about not smoking but the crews themselves smoked while checking the loading operations in the hold. He does not remember any "No Smoking" signs on the Grandcamp and doubts seriously that there were any because the hold of this ship was very badly rusted. He does not remember any warning given by his supervisors who were loading the Grandcamp.

NO 131-65

Mr. SPENCER was some 300 yards away from the explosion of the nitrate ships at Texas City and has no knowledge of the methods used in fighting the fire which occurred prior to the explosion.

ENCLOSURES: TO HOUSTON:

- (1) Memorandum from Assistant Attorney General to Mr. J. EDGAR HOOVER, dated November 26, 1956.
- (2) Memorandum from Assistant Attorney General to Mr. J. EDGAR HOOVER, dated November 9, 1956.
- (3) Signed statement of MARVIN R. SPENCER dated March 9, 1948.

-RUC-

NO 131-65

REFERENCE

Houston letter to the Bureau dated January 14, 1957.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

GIR 1

## FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Form No. 1

THIS CASE ORIGINATED AT HOUSTON

FILE NO.

REPORT MADE AT <b>SAN ANTONIO</b>	DATE WHEN MADE <b>1/29/57</b>	REPORT MADE BY <b>LEE GOLDEN mbd</b>
TITLE <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIG SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, A and 17, 1947, Petitions of Steamship Company and Repu SYNOPSIS OF FACTS: France, Southern Admiralty Nos. 1</b>		CHARACTER OF CASE <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>
<p>CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR is operator of Bluebonnet Tavern situated eleven miles north of Temple, Texas, on U. S. Highway 81, and resides in house trailer at that location. He receives his mail at Post Office Box 187, Eddy, Texas, and Box 234, Troy, Texas. EARL EVERETT DANNAR, reportedly resides in apartment located at 21st and North One-Half Streets, Galveston, Texas.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- RUC -</p> <p>DETAILS:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>AT TROY, TEXAS</u></p> <p>W. W. DANNAR, who lives in a trailer house situated at the Bluebonnet Tavern, which is located eleven miles north of Temple, Texas, on U. S. Highway 81, informed on January 22, 1957, that CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR is the operator of the Bluebonnet Tavern at that address. He related that CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR receives his mail at Post Office Box 187, Eddy, Texas, and Box 234, Troy, Texas, and likewise lives in the trailer house at that tavern.</p>		
APPROVED AND FORWARDED: <i>Squar</i>	SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE	DO NOT WRITE IN THESE SPACES
COPIES OF THIS REPORT 2 - Bureau (AM) 3 - Houston 1 - San Antonio (131-5)		<div style="text-align: right;">RECORDED - 31</div> <div style="text-align: center;">131-313-24</div> <div style="text-align: center;">70 JAN 29 1957</div>

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SA 131-5

He informed that EARL EVERETT DANNAR, son of CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR, resides in an apartment located at 21st and North One-Half Streets, Galveston, Texas, and is employed as Longshoreman for various stevedoring companies in the vicinity of that city. DANNAR's mother is Mrs. ETTA MCKAY, who resides at the intersection of Newman's Road and Highway 6, Alvin, Texas.

- RUC -



SA 131-5

ADMINISTRATIVE

Three copies of this report are being designated for the Houston Office in order that one copy may be furnished to the United States Attorney at Houston in the event such procedure is being followed in this case.

REFERENCES

Airtel from Houston to Bureau, 1/15/57.

Airtel from Dallas to Bureau, 1/16/57.

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>LITTLE ROCK</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>1/30/57</b>	Investigative Period <b>12/20/56; 1/2, 27, 25/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, April 16 &amp; 17, 1947, Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France, Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		Report made by <b>CLABURN T. WHITE</b>	Typed By: <b>crc</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Synopsis:

LEROY HASKELL WOMACK, Benton, Ark., advised has no additional information to furnish, and statement furnished in 1948 is accurate. States does not recall loading ammonium nitrate on other French vessels. JAMES CLOISE WOMACK resides 2912 $\frac{1}{2}$  Bomboy, Dallas 35, Texas.

- R U C -

DETAILS:

AT MURFREESBORO, ARKANSAS:

On December 20, 1956, Mrs. ANNA BELLE WOMACK, mother of JAMES CLOISE WOMACK and LEROY HASKELL WOMACK, advised she did not know the present address of JAMES and LEROY as they had just recently moved to Dallas, Texas, and she had not heard from them since their arrival in Dallas. She stated she expected to hear from them in the near future and would furnish their addresses upon receiving them.

Approved <i>[Signature]</i>	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made: 2 - Bureau 2 - Houston (131-39) 2 - Dallas (131-7) (Encl. 3) (REGISTERED MAIL) 1 - Little Rock (131-7)		131-7-25	RECORDED - 58
		<div style="text-align: right;">31</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div>	

LR 131-7

On January 17, 1957, Mrs. WOMACK advised she had received a letter from LEROY HASKELL WOMACK, and he was presently residing at 802 Hester Street, Benton, Arkansas. She stated LEROY had planned to travel to Dallas, Texas, with JAMES to seek employment but had changed his mind immediately prior to departure and had remained in Benton. Mrs. WOMACK advised she had not received the address of JAMES, but possibly LEROY knew his address.

AT BENTON, ARKANSAS:

On January 25, 1957, LEROY HASKELL WOMACK was located residing at 802 Hester Drive. He advised he is employed in the finishing department at the McCoy-Couch Furniture Company, Benton.

WOMACK advised he could furnish no further information than that furnished in the statement he had given in 1948. He stated to the best of his knowledge the statement he furnished in 1948 is accurate. WOMACK also advised he does not recall loading ammonium nitrate on other French vessels and felt certain that he did not.

LEROY further advised his brother, JAMES CLOISE WOMACK, is presently residing at 2912 $\frac{1}{2}$  Bomboy, Dallas 35, Texas. He stated he does not know where JAMES is employed.

E N C L O S U R E S

TO DALLAS: Photostats of pages 1012, 1013, and 1014 of report of SA JAMES A. FINLEY, dated April 24, 1948, Houston, which reflect the interview of JAMES CLOISE WOMACK.

Signed statement of LEROY HASKELL WOMACK and Photostats of pages 1015, 1016, and 1017 of report of SA JAMES A. FINLEY, April 24, 1948, Houston, reporting interview of WOMACK.

- R U C -

LR 131-7

LEADS

DALLAS OFFICE

AT DALLAS, TEXAS:

Will interview JAMES CLOISE WOMACK, 2912 $\frac{1}{2}$  Bomboy, concerning the information requested in the letter of GEORGE COCHRAN DOUB, Assistant Attorney General, Civil Division, to the Director, dated 11/26/56. (A copy of this letter was forwarded to Dallas by the Houston Office as an enclosure to letter dated 12/7/56.)

Will interview WOMACK based on information previously reported by SA JAMES A. FINLEY, dated April 24, 1948, Houston. (This request and information previously requested of the Little Rock Office are set out in Houston letter dated 12/31/56.) Enclosures are forwarded to the Dallas Office for assistance in interviewing WOMACK.

REFERENCE

Houston letter dated 12/7/56.

Little Rock airtel to Houston dated 12/27/56.

Dallas airtel dated 1/14/57.

Houston airtel to Director dated 12/31/56.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

DATE: January 30, 1957

FROM : SAC, DALLAS (131-7)

SUBJECT: *Wilson* SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company

and Republic of France

Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Reference is made to Houston airtel to Bureau dated 1/14/57.

Investigation at Troup, Texas on 1/17/57, resulted in the location of Mrs. CARL BYRD, the sister of ERNEST TILLMAN GLOVER. Mrs. BYRD advised that GLOVER is presently residing at Homer, Louisiana, and is employed by the Halliburton Oil Field Servicing Company in Homer.

- 2 - Bureau (131-363)
- 1 - Houston (131-39)
- 1 - Dallas (131-7)

CLP:jh

(4)

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30 FEB 3 1957

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

REPORTING OFFICE <b>HOUSTON</b>	OFFICE OF ORIGIN <b>HOUSTON</b>	DATE <b>FEB 4 - 1957</b>	12/11-14, 17, 18, 31/56 INVESTIGATIVE PERIOD <b>1/24, 7-11, 20-24/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP</b> Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France Southern Texas,		REPORT MADE BY <b>JOSEPH J. DOOLING (A)</b>	TYPED BY <b>bjc/ lrs</b>
SYNOPSIS: <b>Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		CHARACTER OF CASE  <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Synopsis: On the morning of 4/16/47 SS GRANDCAMP exploded following fire in No. 4 hold wherein ammonium nitrate fertilizer was being loaded. At 1:10 a.m. on 4/17/47, SS HIGHFLYER exploded while adjacent to SS WILSON B. KEENE. Extensive property damage, deaths, and injuries resulted from explosions. Each of petitioners petitioned the Court to exonerate them from any and all liability in Texas City Disaster on the grounds that each was without fault or to limit their liability to the value of the vessel after the explosion plus their pending freight. 7 of the former longshoremen located and previous statements verified with them. Additional information requested obtained from them where they recalled it. G & H TOWING COMPANY employees interviewed. G & H only towing company operating in Galveston area at time of explosion. Employment and residence of W. A. SANDBERG and EARL EVERETT DANNAR set forth. Two former officials, Lykes Bros., now residing in Houston area, still employed by Lykes; their addresses set forth.

P

APPROVED <i>[Signature]</i>	SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACES BELOW	
COPIES MADE Bureau (131-363) 1-USA, Houston 2-Dallas (131-7) 2-Little Rock (131-7) 2-Los Angeles 2-New Orleans 2-Houston (131-39)		131-363-27	RECORDED-87
		2 FEB 7 1957	EX-120
		STAMP SECT.	

1cc Dale Green  
Civil Div BSM  
2/6/57

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b6  
b7C

LONGSHOREMEN

On December 11, 1956, Major CHARLES A. NYE, Judge Advocate General's office, Galveston, Texas, advised he searched his records and could find the signed statements given by all the individuals presently being considered as witnesses in this matter with the exception of the following:

A. S. GLADWIN, JR.  
JAMES B. PHARR  
J. G. TOMPKINS  
EARL EVERETT DANNAR  
CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR  
ERNEST TILLMAN GLOVER  
JOE CAMPOS MENDOZA  
JAMES CLOISE WOMACK.

It should be also noted that when C. PETER SUDERMAN and Captain H. O. WEATHERBY were interviewed no signed statements were obtained.

COLLIS PETER SUDERMAN  
3910 R $\frac{1}{2}$  Street  
Galveston, Texas  
Telephone: 5-7180

On January 9, 1957, COLLIS PETER SUDERMAN was interviewed at his place of employment, Room 816, U. S. National Bank Building, where he is employed as a superintendent by the A. D. SUDERMAN Stevedore Company. The entire matter which Mr. SUDERMAN discussed with Special Agents H. HILTON MCKEE and JULIAN A. MARTIN on March 16, 1948, at Galveston, Texas, was again discussed with Mr. SUDERMAN. This is set out below:

"General Experience

"For the past several years, Mr. SUDERMAN has held the position of outside superintendent for Suderman Stevedores Incorporated, which is owned and operated by his brother, A. D. SUDERMAN. His job was to supervise the activities of the various gangs working for the company in various Texas ports. In his official connection, he has had considerable experience in the loading of ammonium nitrate fertilizer



on boats. He had no idea that this fertilizer was dangerous or might burn or explode. No one ever gave him any instructions as to any particular manner in which this cargo should be handled or what to do in case of fire. Because of this, he had never issued any instructions himself to the longshoremen working for his company. He stated that ammonium nitrate fertilizer was handled in the same manner as any other cargo of similar nature, such as flour; that it was handled roughly and he has seen bags of the fertilizer dropped considerable distances.

"Safety Regulations

"This witness will testify that ammonium nitrate fertilizer was contained in heavy paper bags of several layers thickness; that there were "no smoking" signs in the warehouses and on the docks and the regulations pertaining thereto were enforced by guards hired by the Texas City Terminal Railway Company. He says that he has never seen anyone smoking in the warehouses, on the docks or on any of the ships. It was a standard regulation if a workman was caught smoking on the ship other than in the galleyway, he would be taken off the job. He has no recollection of ever taking a man off the job for smoking. He says he has been down in the holds of many ships while they were loading cargo and has never seen a workman smoking there. He could not recall whether the GRANDCAMP had 'no smoking' signs on it.

"This witness states that the stevedoring company had nothing to do in hiring the guards for ships, but that the ship owners took care of this matter. He stated that the stevedoring company usually obtained a certificate or pass from the insurance underwriters representative before beginning loading a ship; however, this was not always necessary. He stated that it was a practice of the Texas City Terminal company to have a sack sewer available to rebag spilled nitrate fertilizer and it was the policy of the Suderman Stevedoring Company never to load any broken bags into the trays by which the bags were loaded into the holds of the ships. He could not, however, recall any instances where the sack sewer would be used in the hold of a ship where ammonium nitrate fertilizer was being loaded.

"Pertinent Period

"This witness will testify that he was in Texas City on the day the Grandcamp arrived there for loading on April 11, 1947, and each day thereafter until the day of the explosion. He knew nothing of any previous fires in the hold of the Grandcamp while it was in port prior to the explosion.

"He has no information relative to any workmen smoking in any of the restricted areas, either in the warehouses, docks or on the Grandcamp. It is his recollection that the dunnage was already laid in the holds of the Grandcamp when it arrived at Texas City, but he does not know who put it there. He will state it was customary for either the crew members of the ship or the longshoremen to lay the dunnage. It was also customary that before a ship was loaded, either he or the walking foreman inspected the holds to see that they were properly equipped with dunnage. He could not recall whether the Grandcamp had a guard on it. He could not recall whether the Grandcamp had 'no smoking' signs on it. He did not know whether the underwriter representative had inspected the Grandcamp before loading was started at Texas City, but believed it probable that the holds had been inspected by the underwriter representative at Houston, Texas, in which case, it would not necessarily be reinspected at Texas City prior to the beginning of the loading.

"This witness was on the dock at Warehouse O on April 16, 1947, when the covers of the No. 4 hatch on the Grandcamp were removed. At approximately 8:10 AM someone called him and said there was a fire in the No. 4 hold. He went aboard the Grandcamp, looked into the hold, and saw smoke but did not see any fire. He did not see any longshoremen pour any water on the spot where the smoke was coming from. He states the smoke was coming up along side the cargo boarding and he noticed some of the French crew members stretch a water hose on the offshore side of the ship. Several of the French crew members then went to Hold No. 4 with fire extinguishers. The Captain of the Grandcamp then told this witness in English, clearly enough to be definitely understood, that he was not going to put water on the fire, but was going to use steam.

"The Captain instructed SUDERMAN to get the men out of the hold and batten down the hatch so steam could be turned into the hold. SUDERMAN passed these orders on to his walking foreman, Mr. FAGG. After the hatch was covered, the Captain told SUDERMAN that there was some small ammunition stored in the No. 5 hold and asked that the men bring it out. This witness had FAGG send several longshoremen into the No. 5 hold for the ammunition. He observed a few boxes being handed out, but does not recall any labels on them. The boxes measured 3' x 2' x 14". He presumed this to be ammunition. SUDERMAN then ordered his longshoremen off the Grandcamp and they all left about 8:30 AM.

"This witness then called the Binnings Company in Galveston and talked to Mr. WESTERMAN, telling him there was a fire aboard the Grandcamp and to notify the insurance underwriters and request a fire boat be sent over from Galveston. This witness also telephoned the Texas City Fire Department notifying them of the fire. He had trouble making these telephone calls because the telephone operators in Texas City were on strike and he had to explain the emergency nature of his call before he could get it through.

"This witness then started back toward the Grandcamp. He was about twenty-five feet onto the apron of Warehouse O where he stopped to talk to a man named BEAMER and FEURST, Chief of the Texas City Terminal Company Police and FAGG, his walking foreman. He requested FAGG to see that all the longshoremen were out of the area. While he was there talking, he observed fire coming out of the No. 4 Hold of the Grandcamp for the first time. He stated that the Warehouses were not on fire. The explosion occurred while he was standing near Warehouse O.

"It knocked him unconscious. When he came to, he was about twenty-five feet away from where he was standing and was pinned underneath some planks or boards. He was shortly thereafter placed on a stretcher and taken to a hospital in Galveston by an army ambulance. He did not know anything else that happened until three weeks later."

Mr. SUDERMAN stated that he wished to make two additions to this previous interview, the first of which concerned his statement that he had considerable experience in the loading of ammonium nitrate fertilizer on boats. In this connection he stated that it is his recollection of handling this material on two occasions prior to the Texas City explosion. The first one was on a vessel which he described as the ARGENTINA (phonetic) which had a very small amount of nitrate on it and the second vessel was the LT. J. LEMEUR wherein his company, the A. D. SUDERMAN Stevedore Company, loaded 4580.05 tons from April 3, 1947, to April 8, 1947. In this regard C. P. SUDERMAN stated that JOHN HOFF was the walking foreman on this large loading operation and that his brother, ADOLPHE DONALD SUDERMAN, JR., was the superintendent. Therefore, C. PETER SUDERMAN did not directly supervise this loading on the LT. J. LEMEUR.

C. PETER SUDERMAN stated he had one other addition to make to the previous statement set out above and that was his reason for requesting the longshoremen to leave the general area of the GRANDCAMP when the fire was discovered. He wanted to make it clear that he ordered the men from that area because of the obvious fire and the insurance risk which he would have to take inasmuch as he knew the area was on fire.

SUDERMAN stated that it is general procedure for the officers of a vessel to give the general layout of the cargo to be stowed, further that the officers of any cargo vessel would normally conduct a running inspection to determine the manner of loading. In this regard if an officer saw something which he desired to be changed they always discussed it with the superintendent or foreman of the stevedoring company. SUDERMAN stated that the above rules are normally considered to be operating procedure with any crew officers and stevedoring company. To his recollection this was followed in the case of the GRANDCAMP but no special orders were issued other than that which normally occurs in such cases.

C. PETER SUDERMAN stated that to his recollection he personally had loaded ammonium nitrate on one other occasion and that was on the ARGENTINA (phonetic), also that the stevedoring company which he is superintendent of, loaded on

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on the LT. J. LEMEUR but that he did not actually supervise that operation. SUDERMAN stated that he could recall no special instructions when working on the ARGENTINA and that in his opinion it was loaded like flour. SUDERMAN further stated that in regard to smoking, there is a standing rule that there is to be no smoking while loading any vessel. To his knowledge this rule was not violated in the case of the GRANDCAMP or in the case of the ARGENTINA.

JAMES J. CORBETT  
Route 1, Box 751  
16208 Pine Street  
Channelview, Texas  
Telephone: GL 2-7761

JAMES J. CORBETT was interviewed at his residence on January 8, 1957. He stated that he is employed as a dozer and maintainer operator by the Austin Road Company, whose main office is located in Dallas, Texas. CORBETT stated this company has a sub-office somewhere near Pierce Junction on Route 280 in the vicinity of Houston, but he does not know its location. He advised the Houston Telephone Number is JA 3-6659. CORBETT read the signed statement which he gave to the Agents in 1948 and which is set out below. He verified the accuracy of this statement, which reads as follows:

"Texas City, Texas  
March 11, 1938

"I, J. J. CORBETT, make the following voluntary statement to LEO K. COOK, Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I have been told that this statement can be used in court.

"I'm 31 years of age and live with my wife and child at 2305 Main St in LaMarque, Texas. I get my mail at box 514 LaMarque. I have been a long-shoreman for about 14 years and have loaded fertilizer on nitrate boats ever since they started loading the stuff at Texas City.

"I was winchman on the number 4 hatch on the Grandcamp on the day shift from Monday morning\_

April 14, 1947 until the ship blew up. LEONARD BOSWELL was gang foreman on that shift.

"On Wednesday, April 16, 1947, we started to work at 8:00 A.M. We spent about 15 minutes uncovering the hatch and then 8 men in the gang went down in the hold.

"There was a tray of fertilizer left in the hold from the night before and I let the fall down so the tray could be moved over to the off shore side of the ship. After this was done, the four men working the off shore side began unloading the tray. I don't know what the four men on the inshore side were doing while this was going on.

"About 10 minutes after the gang went into the hold, W. K. THOMPSON, one of the men down there, yelled up that there was smoke in the hold and that there must be a fire down there. I looked in the hatch and the whole gang had gone over to the inshore side where the smoke was and were pulling out bags to see where the fire was coming from.

BOSWELL had us pass down two jug of water and also two fire extinguishers. Some of the French crew were on deck and some of them started passing down a fire hose. PETE SUDERMAN was there by then and he said not to put water on the fire because it would damage the cargo. The ship's captain was there too but I didn't hear him say anything.

"SUDERMAN told JIMMIE FAGG, the walking foreman, to have the men come out of the hold and he said to have the hatch covered and they'd smother the fire with steam.

"The men came out and some of the French crew, that had gone down there, came out about the same time. We covered the hatch and the ship's crew covered the ventilators and then SUDERMAN told the Captain that they were ready for the steam.



"The steam was turned on and then the captain said there was some small ammunition in number 5 hatch and asked for some men to move it. Five or six of us went back there and started moving the boxes to the far aft of the ship. We got from three to five boxes moved and then the fire got so bad we left the ship. It seemed like the steam made the fire get worse.

"It was about 9:00 AM when I left the ship. I got in my car to leave but a Texas City Terminal watchman, I think it was JOHN FURST, said not to leave as some more fire trucks were coming, so I went in the cafe at the end of the wharf and got some coffee. While I was there, the ship blew up. I picked my way out of the cafe wreckage and I remember looking for my brother and father a few minutes and then the next thing I remember I was uptown.

"When I started on the GRAND CAMP I got no instructions about smoking from anyone at all and I didn't see any 'no smoking' signs on the ship but there were 'no smoking' signs on the dock.

"All the other nitrate ships I ever worked on were American ships and they always had a watchman on them. On one of the first nitrate ships I worked I saw a man smoking in the hold once but that is the only time I've ever seen anyone smoke in the hold of a nitrate ship. I have seen fellows smoke on the deck of nitrate ships where there wasn't any 'no smoking' signs up but the watchman would stop them. I've never seen anyone smoke in any of the warehouses because the Texas City Terminal Co. had watchman making the rounds all the time and they wouldn't permit it.

"There was no watchman on the GRAND CAMP, no signs and no instructions against it so I smoked while running the winch. No one ever tried to stop me. The French crew was smoking on the deck all the time and the captain came over to the hatch covering once while smoking a cigar and watched us load.

"I don't recall whether any of the other longshoreman smoked on the GRAND CAMP because I never paid any particular attention.

"This is the only nitrate ship I ever worked on that didn't have a watchman.

"On other nitrate ships I have worked in the hold and in the warehouse. On all such ships there were some broken bags. Some of the bags in the warehouse would be warm and these seemed to be the ones down towards the bottom of the stacks. These bags would sometimes have brown patches on the bottom and looked liked the paper was scorched. When we'd go to pick these bags up they would often break right in the middle and dump the fertilizer out. None of the bags were ever too hot to handle with bare hands. These bags seemed to be the ones that had stood in the warehouse for quite a while.

"On the GRAND CAMP there was no sack sewer and any of the bags that broke going into the hold were loaded anyhow. The breakage on this ship was about the same amount as any other ship I worked on.

"I would say the GRAND CAMP was loaded just the same as any other ship I ever worked on except there was no watchman and no sack sewer. There was nothing unusual about the loading at all. These sacks were marked 'Fertilizer, Ammonium Nitrate, 32.5 per cent nitrate' just like all the other bags. They looked just like any other bags I ever loaded and the nitrate that I saw spilled out looked just like all the other I've seen.

"This stuff is handled rough in loading and is pitched around in the hold and there wasn't any unusual amount of bag breakage on the GRAND CAMP.

"I had never heard whether this fertilizer would or wouldn't burn or whether it would explode and hadn't given it any thought. I've seen it dropped off the trays, I've seen stacks fall over



and I've seen it thrown around and nothing happened. We get double time for loading explosives and according to our wages this wasn't an explosive. We got 10¢ an hour differential for loading nitrate but this was because it was dusty when the bags broke and the dust made a person's nose sting.

"I have read this statement of six pages and it's all time. I have signed my name to each page.

"Signed:  
/s/ "J. J. CORBETT

"Witness:  
/s/ "LEO K. COOK, FBI."

CORBETT stated he would like to make one addition to the statement and that is about the time the stevedore gang originally went down in Hold No. 4 of the GRANDCAMP even before the fire was discovered the Fourth Engineer of the GRANDCAMP went down in the hold with the longshoremen. He stayed there for about six or seven minutes. CORBETT states he does not know the reason for the trip of the Fourth Engineer but felt he should add this information inasmuch as it did happen prior to discovery of the fire and explosion and he thought it might be pertinent.

CORBETT stated he received his orders when loading on the GRANDCAMP from what is known as the walking foreman. CORBETT recalled the walking foreman's name to be JIMMIE FAGG. CORBETT advised that it is his opinion that FAGG received his orders from SUDERMAN, at least as far as CORBETT knew. CORBETT stated to his knowledge the crew and the officers of the GRANDCAMP never controlled the details of the loading, that is, of the stevedores' work.

CORBETT stated that as far as he can now recall he never worked on any French vessel prior to the explosion of the GRANDCAMP.

CORBETT stated at the conclusion of the interview that he does not recall seeing any signs which stated "no

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smoking", or signs which give the location of the fire hose or any othersign which gave information concerning fire precautions or fire equipment while he was on the GRANDCAMP.

JULIO LUNA, JR.  
General Delivery  
Arcadia, Texas  
Telephone: 5161

On January 3, 1957, JULIO LUNA, JR., was interviewed at his residence. He stated he is presently employed as a truck driver at Ellington Air Force Base. He stated that his shift hours are from 4:00 PM to midnight and that he has a Civil Service rating. He can be reached care of the Motor Pool at the Air Force Base, Extension 301.

The signed statement which JULIO LUNA, JR., gave on March 15, 1948, was read by him and he verified the accuracy of this statement, which reads as follows:

"Texas City, Texas  
3/15/48

"I, JULIO LUNA, JR., make the following voluntary statement to Special Agents LEO K. COOK and ROY T. NOONAN, Federal Bureau of Investigation. I understand that this statement can be used in a Court of Law.

"I started doing longshoreman's work about the first of the year, 1946, in Texas City, Texas. I have worked on several nitrate boats. I started working on the Grand Camp, Sunday, April 13, 1947 but I think we were rained out that day. I worked the next days, Monday and Tuesday and went to work Wednesday morning, April 16, 1947 at 8 A.M., working all this time at #4 Hatch, the gang foreman being LEONARD BOSWELL.

"I worked down in the hold. There was no sack sewer on this ship. Whatever bags were torn up and where the fertilizer spilled out, we just left

it there. The breakage on this ship was about the normal amount, that is the same as on other boats I had worked on. We handled this fertilizer about the same as we had handled flour. In loading it, we would relay the bags to each other - that is, two men would throw it on to two others, in order to get it in the back of the hold. We did not give it any gentle handling.

"It was more or less a general understanding that there was not to be any smoking on any boats; however, it is more or less a general practice to smoke on the ships and in the holds, unless there was a guard watching. I have seen smoking on the nitrate or fertilizer boats when they did not have a watchman, but I have never seen a watchman catch anyone smoking. The practice on the Grand Camp was the same as that on other ships and I have seen them smoking in the # 4 hold on that ship.

"In the crew that was in the hold, JOE MENDOZA and J. W. NEWLIN are the only ones I know of who do not smoke. I think there were no special orders against smoking on this ship and I do not remember seeing any signs on the Grand Camp and we also had no watchman on this ship. I cannot recall seeing any of the ship's crew smoking. I talked to one of the crew in Spanish, on Sunday, April 13, 1947.

"On the morning of April 16, 1947, we opened Hatch # 4 at 8 A.M. We had worked up to 5 P.M., Tuesday, April 15, 1947, that is the day before, and everything was normal at that time and we battened down the hatches securely. At 8 A.M., on April 16, 1947, as far as I could see, # 4 hatch was the same as when we left it the night before. It took about 15 minutes, I would say, to uncover # 4 Hatch and when we uncovered it, I saw nothing out of the ordinary. Those of us who went into the Hold, went down the ladder when the hatch was open. The two HASSELL boys, JOE MENDOZA and myself worked on the off-shore side.

"I changed clothes, as I remember, or took my shirt off, and then we went to the tray which was in the hold load as it had been left the night before. This was lifted up by the cable and we swung it back and unhooked the cable. We then hooked on the empty tray on the inshore side, this being the usual practice, as they on that side, when a full tray comes in, unhook and then hook on to the empty tray on our side.

"The empty tray was then taken out by the cable and it is usually four or five minutes before another one comes in.

"The men on the shore side would have had nothing to do from the time we moved our tray in until the empty tray was taken out and a loaded one brought back in under the usual procedure. When one group is waiting for a tray, they will usually lie down or sit down and in such a case, the usual thing is to smoke. I would say it was about ten minutes after we went down in the hold when someone called out about some smoke there. Those of us on the off-shore side, went over in the hatch-way and I think it was J. W. "WINDY" NEWLIN who called up and asked whether any of the Frenchmen were burning paper up there. I could smell smoke and could see smoke in the hatch-way.

"I started looking around with BILL THOMPSON and we located the smoke which was coming up near the skin of the ship on the inshore side, down about seven or eight sacks. It was next to the cargo boards and looked like the ends of one of the bags glowing, there being no flame at that time, but a bit of smoke. We got a gallon jug of water and I poured this on the side, thinking this would put it out. Someone called for more water and another jug was sent down and that was put on. The fire seemed to be spreading toward the front of the ship.

"Someone told the French crew about the fire and four or five of them came down. Everyone was getting a little excited at that time. The French crew had two fire extinguishers but when they put this on the fire, it seemed to burn faster. The Frenchmen were jabbering and doing a lot of talking. I would say this took about seven or eight minutes and about that time, those of us who were working in the hold went up on deck.

"Before we went up on deck, a fire hose had been lowered into the hold from the off-shore side. I, or some of the others, grabbed hold of this hose and started pulling it toward the in-shore side, where the fire was but no water was coming out of the hose and I don't remember whether I threw it down, dropped it or whether the Frenchmen took it.

"When we got up on deck, someone mentioned the ammunition in #5 Hatch and JIM DOUGLAS and I went down in # 5 Hatch and JIM DOUGLAS and I went down in # 5 Hatch and tied ropes on some pieces of ammunition, while others pulled them up on deck. I helped

"I helped with three or four and there were still some down there when someone dropped something on deck and I got excited and went up and I think JIM DOUGLAS followed right after me. One of these boxes was open and I could see the ammunition which I think was about 30 caliber. Some of the French crew were down there with us at this time and were carrying it over to where we put the ropes on it. When we got back to # 4 Hatch, we got orders to cover it, from the stevadore or JIMMY FAGG, who were both there together.

"I remember hearing SUDERMAN say to hurry up and cover the Hatch as he did not want any of his men working on a ship that was burning up. We had to keep two or three boards off to get the rest of the Frenchmen out. I remember this, as we couldn't find the cleats to fasten down the tarpaulins.

"I also remember seeing someone turning the steam valves on, but I do not remember who this was. I would say that from the time we came out of the Hold, it was five or ten minutes before we started covering up and this probably took five minutes more. At that time, the smoke was rolling out pretty heavily. Some of the crew of the ship were covering the ventilators. When we got off the ship and got to the end of the dock, I saw the hatch covers blow off tarps and all. I could then see flames out of the hatch.

"WILLIAM R. LONG, WADE WILSON, both of whom had been working on # 2 Hatch, and myself went direct to my car and drove uptown, getting to the corner of Texas and Third Avenue when the explosion occurred.

"I have, in the past, worked loading this fertilizer from the warehouse into the boats and also have worked in the holds on other ships. This fertilizer always came in 100 pound sacks which had printed on them the word 'Fertilizer, Ammonium Nitrate' and percentage of something and also had TVA.

"This material was the same on all the ships that I worked on and the number of sacks found broken on other loadings was about the same as on this one.

/s/ "JULIO LUNA, JR.  
JULIO LUNA, JR.

WITNESS:

"ROY T. NOONAN, F.B.I.  
LEO K. COOK, FBI."

At the conclusion of the statement LUNA stated he wanted to clarify one matter and that is that it could be inferred from the statement that he, LUNA, had a habit of smoking prior to and after the Texas City explosion. LUNA stated he would like to point out that he has only been in the habit of smoking in the last two years and did not

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smoke at the time of the explosion. Also in regard to the statement LUNA states he now cannot recall the name of his employer on the date of April 16, 1947; however, the signed statement concerning this was correct when made.

LUNA stated he would like to add some items in order to be of help in this matter. He stated he cannot recall any "no smoking" signs on the GRANDCAMP or any other vessel wherein ammonium material was a cargo. He also stated that he had loaded ammonium nitrate before but he does not recall on what vessels or the country from which these vessels originated; however, in connection with the previous loading of ammonium nitrate before the Texas City explosion, LUNA stated the regulations were there was to be no smoking while loading the vessel but that they were not enforced. He states there was not normally a watchman to check to see that the longshoremen did not smoke.

LUNA stated he received his orders from the foreman of the stevedoring company and that he never got any orders from crew members or crew officers. The stevedoring company controlled the operation.

LUNA stated that the crew of the vessel and the stevedoring crew tried to put out the fire when it first started. LUNA recalled that he was one of the first to discover the fire. In this regard LUNA stated that he recalled some French officers coming up and looking down into the hold before the hatch covers were put on Hold No. 4. These French officers gave orders in French which LUNA thought to be to the effect to lower a fire hose to the French crew. LUNA stated these orders were given by the French officers when he was still down in the hold. LUNA stated in his opinion the French officers on the vessel knew of the fire within five to ten minutes after it was originally discovered. LUNA stated he did not know who called the fire company but as he now recalls they arrived 25 to 30 minutes after the fire was discovered.

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JOE CAMPOS MENDOZA  
Box 124  
Arcadia, Texas  
Telephone: 4342

On January 3, 1957, JOE MENDOZA was interviewed at his place of employment. He is employed by the J. F. Pritchard Company, which has its headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri, street address unknown. MENDOZA is a carpenter and that firm is presently doing construction work at Monsanto Chemical Company, Texas City, Texas. MENDOZA stated after reviewing in detail the interview conducted on March 17, 1948, at Texas City, Texas, by Special Agents ROY T. NOONAN and LEO K. COOK that it was correct.

The following is the interview as recorded which was conducted on March 17, 1948:

"General Experience

"This witness was a longshoreman for approximately fifteen months prior to the explosion. He has participated in the loading of nitrate on various ships. He never received any special instructions on handling it other than that he should be careful not to break the bags. It was accordingly thrown around and handled like flour or any other similar type of cargo. He did not think that it would burn or explode.

"Safety Regulations

"The nitrate was in brown paper bags weighing about one-hundred pounds and printed on them were the words, 'Ammonium Nitrate 31.5% Nitrogen,' and 'Fertilizer.' On some occasions the bags would be labeled to show where they had originally come from.

"According to the witness, it was a general practice of the longshoreman to smoke in the holds of the ships and when a tray of nitrate would come down while they were smoking they would on occasions put the cigarettes out or at other times they would lay the cigarettes down on the bags in the hold or on the flange of the beams or on cargo boards,



or any other place that was handy while they unloaded the tray. Sometimes when the men were waiting for a tray to go into the hold they would sit around and smoke.

"Pertinent Period

"This witness started working in Hold Number Four of the Grand Camp on the day shift on April 12, 1947. He did not work on Sunday, April 13, 1947 because it rained. He did, however, work on April 14, 1947 from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. He recalls that the others working in the hold of this vessel with him were JULIO LUNA, JR., J. W. NEWLIN, the two HASSELL boys, BILL THOMPSON, two brothers from Arkansas, whose names he does not recall, and possibly a man named LaBLUE. He is not sure of the latter because there were only eight of them altogether working.

"On April 15, 1947 the witness and the others covered Number Four Hatch on the Grand Camp at 5:00 P.M. When he came out of the hold that evening everything seemed to be normal. He went to work at 8:00 A. M. on April 16, 1947 at which time he found the hatch still covered and looking like it had been left the night before. Nothing seemed unusual. It took about ten minutes or so to uncover the hatch and then the witness and the other seven men went down into the hold.

"The witness worked there with the HASSELL boys and JULIO LUNA on the off-shore side while the others worked on the in-shore side. Upon arriving in the hold that morning there was a loaded tray of nitrate which they had left there the night before. This was the tray of the witness's group, or in other words, the one serving those working on the off-shore side of the ship.

"The winchman let the fall down and they hooked it on the tray so that it could swing over toward the off-shore side. To the best of witness's recollection, the tray had not been lifted when he smelled smoke and remarked that something was burning.

"Up until that time the four fellows on the in-shore crew had not done anything except stand around and take off their shirts and hang them up. The witness and the other men

did not know where the smoke was coming from and at that time the witness estimates there was about as much smoke as would come from a burning wastebasket. Someone yelled to the ones on deck that something was burning down in the hold and immediately the witness and the others started looking for the fire. One of the other individuals found it, whose identity cannot be recalled by the witness, and it was on the in-shore side.

"All of the men went over to look at it and the witness looked down between the cargo board and the skin of the ship and saw some flame. It appeared to be right at the cargo board about two bags down and the fire seemed to go on as far as he could see. It looked to be about two or three bags wide. He figured there were just a few bags, so he ran over and poured a gallon bucket of drinking water on it. The witness thinks that there was another gallon bucket put on the fire by someone he does not recall.

"Someone yelled to send down the fire hose that there was a fire down there and a hose was passed down from the off-shore hatch. Someone on the deck said not to put water on the nitrate but witness cannot remember who made this statement. A little water trickled from the hose but the hose was never pulled over to where the fire was.

"Three or four of the French crew had gone down into the hold and a couple of fire extinguishers were passed down. To the best of witness's memory, these crew members handled the fire extinguishers and put them on the fire. He does not recall whether this was before or after the hose was passed down. Someone turned over five or six of the bags which were burning and the fluid in the extinguishers was thrown on them putting out the fire on these bags.

"Somebody on deck yelled to come up that they were going to cover up the hatch. Someone then helped the witness knock the fall from the tray and he then went up on deck. JIMMIE FAGG, BOSWELL, PETE SUDERMAN, and somebody who witness thinks was the captain of the ship were around the hatch. After witness was on deck, someone stated that they were going to put steam on the fire. Witness does not know who said this but he thinks it was JIMMIE CORBETT. Someone else

said to cover up the hatch and the men then started to do this. While the boards were being put on, the captain said there was some ammunition in Number Five Hatch and PETE SUDERMAN ordered a few of the men, including the witness, to go back and help get the ammunition out.

"JIM DOUGLAS and some of the others went down between decks where the ammunition was and tied ropes on the boxes and some of the men, including the witness, pulled them up to the deck. About five or six boxes were pulled up and were moved to the rear of the boat. Witness saw some of this and believes that it was small arms ammunition of about .25 caliber.

"In the meantime Number Four Hatch had been covered and the crew had covered the ventilators and someone in the crew had turned the steam on. The fire then seemed to get worse and the tarps covering the hatches were burned. The witness then left the ship. Upon reaching the dock, someone told the witness to push some carts of nitrate that were on the dock back into the warehouse and he, along with some of the others, did this. He then went to the end of the dock and stood there for a couple of minutes. Some young fellow, who was standing there, remarked that it would be better to get out of there because the ship might blow up. Accordingly, witness and his brother-in-law, LOUIS GARCIA, who was with him, got in a pickup truck which was nearby and drove it past Franks Cafe about 200 yards from the ship. While sitting on a soda box case in the back of the truck, the Grand Camp blew up. He then tried to get back into the cab of the truck but was hit before he could do it.

"After stuff stopped falling, LOUIS GARCIA and the witness started toward town. Someone picked them up and took them to a hospital at Goose Creek where the witness was when the High Flyer blew up.

"The witness can testify that he received no instructions not to smoke on the Grand Camp and he further does not recall seeing any 'No Smoking' signs on the ship. Although witness does not smoke, he does recall that some of the men in the hold did smoke on that ship while the nitrate was being loaded. He does not recall seeing any

cigarettes lying around in the hold on the morning of April 16, 1947. He does recall having seen one or two members of the French crew looking down into the hold over the hatch coaming while they were smoking. Some of the longshoremen also smoked on the deck of the Grand Camp. The witness, however, does not recall any of the crew or any of the longshoremen smoking on deck on the morning of the explosion. As far as he knew, smoking was allowed on the deck of the Grand Camp but the men in the hold were prohibited from smoking and when they did smoke, they had to 'sneak it.'

"Witness recalls there was a sack sewer on the Grand Camp who was supposed to work both hatches, but the general practice was to store any broken bags that came into the hold in the condition that they came in or to get them out any way that was possible. This was the general practice followed on all of the nitrate ships that the witness worked.

"He further states that the bags placed on board the Grand Camp were just like the bags that he had loaded on other ships, and the spilled nitrate that he saw looked like all of the other nitrate that he has ever seen before."

MENDOZA stated that he had loaded ammonium nitrate prior to the Texas City explosion but cannot recall if it was loaded on French vessels or even recall the name of any such vessel. He did not concern himself at the time with the regulations regarding smoking as he did not smoke during that period.

MENDOZA advised the loading of the vessel known as the GRANDCAMP was supervised by the stevedoring company, which in this case was Suderman. He further stated that the officers and crew of the French vessel had no supervision of the loading to MENDOZA's knowledge. MENDOZA explained that he recalls the French crew assisted in trying to put out the fire on the GRANDCAMP, but cannot recall any other facts which may be pertinent to this investigation.

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MARVIN R. SPENCER  
Arcadia, Texas.

On January 11, 1957, ELWIN SPENCER, 1215 First Avenue North, Texas City, Texas, advised he is the brother of MARVIN SPENCER. He further advised he and MARVIN are partners in a painting business. At the present time MARVIN is residing at 531 Second Street, Harvey, Louisiana. ELWIN and MARVIN SPENCER are sub-contractors for the Sea Engineering and Salvage, which firm is doing work for Shell Oil Company. The site of this work is on the premises of a firm called Protecto Kote Corporation, Peters Road, Harvey, Louisiana, telephone Filmore 1-1666.

JOHN HENRY HOFF  
1918 Fifteenth Avenue North  
Texas City, Texas.

On January 4, 1957, JOHN HOFF was interviewed at his residence, at which time he stated he is an unemployed longshoreman. HOFF read the signed statement which he gave on March 5, 1948, to Special Agents LEO K. COOK and ROY T. NOONAN in Texas City, Texas. He stated this signed statement, set out below, is correct.

"Texas City, Texas.  
March 5, 1948.

"I, John Henry Hoff, make this statement to Leo K. Cook and Roy T. Noonan, Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"I reside on Route Number One, Box 188A, Texas City. I have been a longshoreman for about 28 years, since 1920, and am a member of the ILA 636. I went to work on the Grand Camp about the 11th of April 1947, when it came in about 11 AM, and was on the day shift. I did not work on the Highflyer. I was walking foreman and my duties were to look after the loading of the cargo to see that it was properly loaded. I got my instructions from the A. D. Suderman Stevedore Co. These orders or instructions were

to go ahead and store the cargo according to the directions of the ship's officers. In this case on the Grand Camp I got these instructions from the Second Mate who was the only ship officer I had any contact with. The Second Mate said that he wanted double dunnage. The dunnage was already in the holds. There was excessive dunnage in hold number four and I asked and was given permission to lay three layers of dunnage there. We put paper over the dunnage and on the sides of the ship we put paper over the cargo boards which were already nailed on the sides. This paper is about twice the thickness of butcher shop paper. It was the day before the ship came in that I was contacted by Suderman's thru Pete Suderman.

"The Highflyer was in first and it moved out of Pier 0 on the 12th,

"As to the smoking regulations I did not receive any particular instructions as to the Grand Camp but I had received previous instructions as to other ships and I assumed the same applied here. These orders were not to smoke on deck or in the hold. I gave these orders to the gang foremen on the Grand Camp. I gave these orders to L. Boswell on Number 4 hatch and to C. R. Dannar on Number 2 hatch. I gave these orders to Dannar when he asked me on April 11th and to Boswell when he was rigging up No. 4 hatch. As walking foreman I was on the deck, in the holds, and in the warehouse. I saw the ship's crew smoking, many of them all the time at night when I was on the night shift, and they were smoking on the deck and around the coaming of the hatches. I called this to the attention of the Second Mate and he said they always did that. It was on Sunday the 13th of April that I went on night shift duty and I saw the crew members smoking that night and on the next Monday and Tuesday nights. I did not see anyone smoking at any time in the warehouse. There were at least six 'No Smoking' signs in English on the Grand Camp. I don't think there were any signs in French.

"In the warehouse there was other cargo to go on this ship. I remember flour and some cases of Jacks but what kind I do not know. We loaded the material known to the longshoremen as 'Fertilizer' from three different sections of the warehouse. We never loaded anything else from anyone section but this fertilizer. The sections were separated by corrugated iron.

"We had no sack sewers during the time we were loading the Grand Camp. I took this up with Pete Suderman on the 12th of April, the second day. He went on deck and when he came back he said the Captain of the ship said the French Gov't would not stand for this expense. I thereafter went to Mr. Fundling, employee of the Terminal City Ry. Co., and asked him to send a sack sewer. He said that he might but he had not by the time the disaster happened. He was killed in the disaster. Regarding these bags, some were broken in the warehouse before my men did any work on them and a small percent were broken in handling after they got in the hold. I would say that about 200 sacks were broken in handling in the hold. About 300 sacks that were broken or found broken were left or set aside in the warehouse and not loaded, these figures being the amount my men handled. This included my work on #4 hatch days and #2 hatch nights. I don't think #4 hatch was worked at night after Saturday night the 12th of April.

"This discussion with the mate of the ship regarding the sack sewer came up when he and I were looking into the hold and saw a sack break when the men were loading in. He asked me if I could furnish him with some extra sacks so that he could resack it before discharging the cargo and I did supply him with 300 to 400 extra sacks. There are usually 90 to 100 sacks supplied with each carload. No orders were given by Suderman to load the broken bags. I asked him what to do with them and he gave me no answer.

"These paper bags in which this fertilizer was loaded were square bags, about 4 thicknesses, with



the inner paper black and the outer a tan or yellow color. The bags that were weak or gave way were dark brown or had dark brown spots. Sometimes the whole side of one bag would be dark brown and the other side would be the regular color. No one on the Grand Camp or working on the loading ever said the sacks were hot or cold, and no one ever mentioned having loaded hot sacks into a ship. Once I heard it mentioned that hot bags had been unloaded from cars to the warehouse. I never felt a hot bag and this has only been mentioned to me.

"I first began loading Fertilizer, or nitrate as it is sometimes called in Texas City in 1941. While walking foreman for 12 years I have also assisted or did actual loading up until about a week before April 16, 1947. The bags have been the same since 1941; the brown spots have appeared during all that time; the breakage has been about the same; the material in the bags has been the same as to color and general appearance, and it appeared the same when loaded on the Grand Camp as it did for the several years before that. The dunnage has been the same, the paper used has been the same. Nothing has been different except that this is the first time there was no sack sewer on the ship. However I have seen sacks put away in ships when the sacks had been broken open but not as many as were put on the Grand Camp. The general practice was to sack up what could be gotten of the spilled nitrate but what little might be scattered around was not bothered with. On the Grand Camp that which was spilled was not gathered up as we had no one to do it. About a week ahead of this a French ship, The Lieutenant, was loaded with this same material and the Chief mate had ordered a sack sewer in each hold and sacked up all the spilled material and was very particular about it. I never heard this referred to as an explosive, not till after the disaster. I never heard of this material being dangerous and had not heard that it would burn. The rule as to no smoking was for all ships and was because of the dunnage and paper used as much as anything else. This fertilizer was handled much the same as flour.



"We were paid a differential pay of 10¢ an hour more for handling this fertilizer. It was not specifically named but was among about 10 or 12 other items in the IIA contract. I understood it was because of the dust in handling this material. But on the Grand Camp there was no dust as the weather was damp.

"On the Grand Camp we used the gang foreman as gangwayman as we had no separate gangway or signal man. During the war we always had a signal man but since it has changed until recently we seldom have a gangway or signal man. Usually the foreman then has to take over the duties of the gangwayman which hampers his supervision of his men.

"I have read this statement, three typewritten pages and have signed my name to each page.

/s/ "JOHN H. HOFF"

HOFF stated he feels sure he had loaded ammonium nitrate on a French vessel prior to the Texas City explosion; however, he cannot swear to it. He thinks the vessel was loaded in the vicinity of Texas City just prior to the loading of the GRANDCAMP; however, he cannot recall the name of the vessel, stevedoring company, or any details connected with this previous handling of ammonium nitrate.

HOFF advised that it is customary for the foreman of the stevedoring crew to load according to the instructions of the Chief Mate on any vessel. As he recalls it, however, it was the Second Mate who gave orders on the GRANDCAMP and HOFF feels that this was because the Second Mate was the only one who could speak good English to HOFF's knowledge.

The instructions given by this Second Mate were given to HOFF. HOFF stated the Second Mate told him how the cargo was to be stowed and what dunnage the Second Mate wanted in the hold. HOFF advised he cannot recall at this time any further details concerning this matter. HOFF stated he never caught any of his longshoremen smoking where they were in an area wherein smoking was normally

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prohibited. During the course of this interview HOFF frequently remarked that it had been too long for him to recall anything or to add anything to the previous interview in 1948.

The following investigation at Port Arthur, Texas, was conducted on January 14, 1957, by Special Agent WILLIAM J. SCHMIDT:

LEONARD D. BOSWELL  
202 Fifth Street  
Port Arthur, Texas

LEONARD D. BOSWELL is employed as a longshoreman working out of Local 1029, International Longshoremen's Association, 424 San Antonio Street, Port Arthur, Texas. BOSWELL read the statement which he furnished to Special Agents LEO K. COOK and ROY T. NOONAN on March 8, 1948, at Texas City, Texas, and stated to the best of his recollection it is correct. This statement is set out below.

"Texas City, Texas.  
March 8, 1948.

"I, Leonard Boswell, make this statement to Leo K. Cook and Roy T. Noonan, Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"I have been a longshoreman since 1938. My address is Box 325, Texas City, Tex. I am also a member of the warehouseman's union. I was gang foreman on Number 4 hatch on the Grand Camp, starting on Saturday, April 12, 1947. I was on the day shift except the first day, the 12th, when I worked until 10 PM. On the next day, Sunday, we came to work but I don't think we even uncovered as it was raining and we knocked off. Monday we worked all day and also on Tuesday the 15th of April, and went to work at 8 AM on the 16th. One night a crew worked and I think that was Monday night. I had only 20 men in my crew and did not have a signalman or a sack sewer. I had to handle the work of signalman and therefore could not keep close supervision over

the men in my crew. I was only in the hold of the Grand Camp once as I recall, and that was at the start of the loading when I went down to see about the dunnage. It was rough dunnage but it ok'd by the walking foreman. I think I was on the wharf only once too, and did not get in the warehouse. I was at the hatch opening most of the time.

"As to the loading of this ship the walking foreman gave me my orders. Those orders were to pack the fertilizer close together and there were no other instructions. No instructions were given as to the care to be used in handling or loading. No instructions were given as to the use of a sack sewer or as to rebagging of broken bags.

"Regarding the smoking regulations no instructions were given as to smoking by anyone or to anyone. Some ships have watchmen on them to see that no one smokes and sometimes the ship's mate keeps a pretty close watch to see that no one smokes. There was no watchman on this ship but many of the Fertilizer ships did have watchmen. I saw the Captain of the ship once or twice but he did not say anything to me. On other ships I have seen the winchman ordered to stop smoking. I did not notice any smoking in the hold of this ship and I do not recall seeing any cigarette butts there, so I can not say whether there was any smoking or not. I did see the winchmen smoking most of the time and there were cigarette butts on the deck. Members of the ship's crew were around all the time smoking and they were passing back and forth past the coaming of the hatch. I gave no orders against smoking on this ship to anyone and no orders were given to me by the walking foreman. I saw no one on the wharf smoking. I did not see any no smoking signs on this ship. On other ships I have seen the no smoking signs. There were numerous signs at the dock and thru the dock area and I think they have been there the ten years I have been a long-shoreman.

"As to the bags of fertilizer being loaded I was given no instructions as to the handling of broken bags and I gave no order as to how they should be handled. It was the general practice in the warehouse to set aside any bags that were badly broken but if only a small hole then they would be loaded. These bags sometimes get rotten from sitting on the floor and they break easily; some get snagged, sometimes a few get broken in loading by the trays hitting them, and some get broken from rough handling in the hold. I could not say whether any broken bags were loaded on the Grand Camp from the warehouse but I did see some broken bags in the open hatch and there was some loose fertilizer in the open hatch but not much. I have seen more broken bags on other ships than I saw on the Grand Camp. This was when I rebagged some of it on other ships. I would say that there was a little less breakage on this ship than on some of the other ones I have worked on. I will say that none of the bags were brought out of the hold after they were lowered in there. Usually there is a sack sewer on these ships and I would say that a sack sewer was on about 75% of the ships. I don't know why the Grand Camp did not have any and no one made any statement as to why not. Usually the business agent of the union who is contacted by the stevedore arranges for the sack sewer, that is, will designate an extra man for a gang and will tell the foreman that this man is to be the sack sewer.

"As to the bags I have unloaded as warehouseman from the box cars into the warehouse, and from the warehouse to the ships. I have often found broken or torn bags. Some of this is caused by damp weather and the paper seems to rot. This makes the bags a reddish brown color. I have found some in the box cars that way but not many and not as many as have been found in the warehouse. Sometimes these sacks are warm and I have seen sacks that look sort of charred and the paper has been darker than that which appears to have changed color because of dampness. I have handled sacks that were warm but

never too hot to handle by bare hands. There have been more sacks warm in the box cars than I noticed in the warehouse as when the bags are damp they do not seem to be as warm. I have been unloading and loading at Texas City since 1945. The bags are brown in color and they have looked about the same from the time I started handling them until I quite. I have loaded some in Galveston since the disaster and they still looked the same. I remember that the bags have always been marked 'Fertilizer' and 'Ammonium Nitrate', and at first I recall that the letters 'TVA' were on some of the bags. It was usually referred to as Fertilizer by the long-shoremen and sometimes as 'Nitrate'. I will say that the Grand Camp was loaded the same as the other ships I worked on, the handling was the same and the number of men and the general procedure was the same.

"On Tuesday evening the 15th of April 1947 we closed the hatch about 5 PM and put the cover on in the usual manner as we had heard that no night crew would be working that night. On Wednesday morning, the 16th, we all boarded the ship at the same time, 8 AM, after having met at the end of the dock and we all or most all of us went up to uncover. This took 10 or 15 minutes. Then eight men went into the hold, nine men to the warehouse, and two winchmen went to their work. A tray had been left in the hold the night before and this was swung back toward the rear by the winchmen. One of the crew, Julio Luna, Jr., looked up and asked me if anything was burning. I would say that this was about four minutes after they had gone down in the hold. Some of the men were stripping for work. Right after Luna called up William Thompson said 'Here it is' and asked for a jug of water to be sent down. I told them that they had a jug of water down there and about that time someone said it would take a lot of water. I don't know if a fire extinguisher was lowered or not. I went for the walking foreman, going to Number Two hatch and when he was not there I called to him from the side of the ship and

he came from the wharf. About the time he got there Suderman, the stevedore who had been around there for several days, also appeared. When I got back from calling the walking foreman the hose was about half way lowered into the hold, but whether the ship's crew lowered it or not I do not know. Suderman told Fagg not to put water on the fire as it would ruin the cargo. Fagg then gave the same order to me. I did not repeat it but ordered the men out of the hold and said that we would let them put the fire out. Suderman gave the order to close the hatch and put the cover on as they were going to put it out with steam. About that time Jim Corbett said there was some ammunition on this ship and Fagg said to send some men to help get it out. I told some of them to go help, and I think Lewis, Wilson, and Douglas and maybe some others went up to Hold 5 to help out. I don't know what they did but I did see them carrying some boxes out. I do remember some of the ship's crew closing some of the ventilators. After we closed the hatch it was only a couple of minutes and we could see the hatch covers rising up and down and I said to the men that we should get off the ship which we did. After we got off I and two or three others pushed the 3 four-wheel trucks back in the warehouse and then left. I caught a ride and was about at 3rd St. and 1st Ave. S., four or five blocks away when the explosion occurred.

"As I remember I worked maybe a day or two on the HighFlyer before the Grand Camp came in, but it was only for a short time. I do not remember anything out of the ordinary on that ship, and it was loaded in the same manner as other ships I had worked on.

"I have read this statement, three typewritten pages, and have signed each page.

/s/"L. D. BOSWELL"

BOSWELL advised that to the best of his recollection he did not load ammonium nitrate on any other French vessel and stated that he could not add anything to the signed statement or recall any details not recorded in that signed statement.

The following investigation was conducted by Special Agent ROBERT H. LITTLE on January 9, 1957, at Seadrift, Texas:

DENNIS ANDERSON WILSON  
Box 793  
Seadrift, Texas

DENNIS WILSON stated he is presently employed by the Smith Bros. Dredging Company, Port Lavaca, Texas, telephone JACKSON 4-3785. WILSON read the signed statement furnished on March 23, 1948, and stated it was correct. This statement is set out below.

"Seadrift, Texas,  
March 23, 1948.

"I, Dennis A. Wilson, make the following voluntary statement to M. A. Ruebright, whom I know to be a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and this statement may be used in a Court of Law.

"I started working for the A. D. Suderman Stevedoring Company in December 1946. I reported for work to Mr. Leonard Boswell at 8:00 Am on April 16, 1947 as a longshoreman. I was assigned that morning to help load Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer on the SS Grand Camp. The first thing that I did that morning was to open the warehouse doors and I was doing this when I heard somebody yell from the SS Grand Camp that there was a fire in the hold of the SS Grand Camp. I dont remember who yelled from the ship. I was standing on the dock near the Grand Camp and they yelled for me to come aboard and help cover up the hatches. I then went aboard the Grand Camp and went over and looked into the #4 hold. I couldn't see anything



down there except some blackish looking smoke coming out of the hold. It was just barely smoking at that time. I did see a water hose leading down into the #4 hold but no water was coming from it.

"The people that I remember standing around the #4 hold were Mr. Pete Suderman; I believe the first mate of the SS Grand Camp; Mr. Leonard Boswell; a Mexican named Luna; a longshoreman named Thompson; and maybe one or two others whose names I cannot recall. I heard either Mr. Pete Suderman or the mate of the SS Grand Camp say not to turn the water on. I then heard Mr. Suderman say to cover up the hatch that they were going to put steam in there. We all started covering the hatches and after we got the hatch covers on they started putting the steam in there and one of the hatch covers on the port side aft blew off. Several other hatch covers blew off after that.

"Mr. Boswell then told us that there was some ammunition in #5 hatch and wanted us to get it out. About six or eight of us went down into #5 hatch and started getting the ammunition out. Each box weighed somewhere between 75 and 100 pounds. After we had removed some of the ammunition we found some of the ammunition was too heavy to lift out so they wanted us to rig the booms so that it could be lifted out. We started rigging the boom and then about that time someone came over and told us to get off the ship. I believe that it was Mr. Boswell who told us that but I am not sure. It was about 8:15 Am when I heard that there was a fire on the SS Grand Camp and it was about 8:45 Am when I left the ship. I then went to the end of the pier and while I was standing there I saw about 10 of the French crew come off the SS Grand Camp with their clothes and other bundles. After standing on the pier for about 10 minutes I left with my brother-in-law, Henry David who had been working on the SS Wilson B. Keene. We went up town in Texas City and bought some chicken feed and then went to the Evans Food Store and just after we entered the store the blast came. Neither one of us was hurt.



"I have handled the loading of Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer before on several occasions and have unloaded it from box-cars right onto the ships and also from warehouses. I knew that no one was supposed to smoke in the holds of the ships, on the piers, in the warehouses and that if anyone wanted to smoke he could go to the companionway of the ship or the galley. I have seen men smoke in the holds of ships and have done so myself but did not see anyone smoking on the SS Grand Camp because the morning of the explosion was the first time that I had ever been on the Grand Camp and that was after the fire was discovered. Right after I went to work at Texas City in 1946 I was smoking on deck of one of the ships and my gang toter Chester Huff told me not to smoke on the ships and I stopped. No one ever told me not to smoke other than when Mr. Huff called me down about smoking. I never received any instructions about smoking or the handling of Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer.

"I had received some instructions about broken sacks of Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer and that was to lay them aside and have them refilled into other sacks. I received no instructions about broken sacks on the SS Grand Camp since April 16, 1947 was the first day of work for me in about three weeks.

"No one ever told me that Ammonium Nitrate Fertilizer was dangerous to handle. I remember the sacks were marked Ammonium Nitrate 32 percent or something like that. There were signs which read no smoking on the pier and in the warehouses.

"I have no information as to what started the fire in the #4 hold of the SS Grand Camp. I remember that when they put steam into the #4 hold that the fire really started to get out of control and after the hatch blew off the canvas started burning. The smoke at that time was orange-colored.

"I have read this statement and it is true and correct.

/s/ "DENNIS A. WILSON  
"Dennis A. Wilson

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"Witnessed:

/s/ "M. A. RUEBRIGHT,

"M. A. Ruebright, Special Agent, Federal  
Bureau of Investigation - Houston"

WILSON cannot now recall whether or not he had ever loaded ammonium nitrate on any other French vessel but does not believe that he has done so. In this connection WILSON pointed out, and it is reflected in his signed statement, that he had not actually been aboard the GRAND-CAMP until the fire started on the morning of April 16, 1947.

WILSON stated that the longshoremen received their instructions from the gang foreman who supervised the loading into the ship's hold and that a walking foreman had the over-all supervision of loading the vessel. WILSON stated that the crew possibly conferred with a foreman concerning the loading of a ship and had some control over the loading but that he, WILSON, had no personal knowledge in this regard. WILSON also stated that he could not recall any regulations regarding smoking except for signs which prohibited smoking. He said most ships had a sign posted at the gangway stating "No Smoking." WILSON could recall no other details in the matter.

[REDACTED]  
Address Unknown

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During the course of this investigation the various individuals interviewed were asked if they knew the whereabouts or employer of [REDACTED]. No information was obtained as a result of these inquiries; however, it was ascertained on January 3, 1957, from JOE MENDOZA that [REDACTED] had been arrested on some local charge.

The Galveston Police Department records were checked on January 3, 1957, and it was ascertained that Police Department No. [REDACTED] reflected that [REDACTED] was arrested on January 24, 1953, for DWI and paid a fine on

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June 12, 1953, of \$134.00. The attorney of record was C. MARVIN GREGG, Texas City.

On January 4, 1957, C. M. GREGG, Texas City, advised he did not recall [redacted]

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On January 10, 1957, Mrs. T. E. SPARKS, 2417 Fourth Avenue North, and Mrs. VIOLET YOUNG were interviewed. Mrs. YOUNG resides at 2413 Fourth Avenue North. Mrs. SPARKS advised she could not recall this individual but Mrs. YOUNG stated that [redacted] was known to her as [redacted] and had formerly resided in what is now the [redacted] in Texas City. At the time of his residence in this block he was married to a [redacted] whose previous husband was killed in the Texas City blast and who had two daughters by that previous marriage. Subsequently, sometime in 1953, [redacted] died of cancer and since that time Mrs. YOUNG has not seen [redacted]

On January 10, 1957, a check of the indices of the Texas City Police Department was made and it reflected that the address of [redacted] was [redacted] in May of 1953. It further advised that his mother and father were named [redacted] and they resided at [redacted] Texas City, Texas. Inquiries at these 1953 addresses on that same date all met with negative results, no one being able to recall the name of [redacted] in that area.

On January 11, 1956, Sgt. T. W. LEWIS of the Galveston Police Department was interviewed. Sgt. LEWIS works in the payroll office of Screwmen's Hall, 20th and Mechanic Street, Galveston, which is the International Longshoremen's Association Local 307. Sgt. LEWIS stated although he is familiar with the payroll names of the longshoremen he is not familiar with [redacted]

On January 11, 1957, T-1, who has furnished reliable information in the past, advised [redacted] had [redacted] until June, 1953, and since that time has had no mailing address in Texas City.

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T-1 further advised that from his knowledge of individuals in the Texas City area he believes that [redacted] Texas City, could be a relative of the individual in question. He further advised that [redacted] the deceased wife of [redacted] went under the name of [redacted] before she married [redacted]. He also advised that he believes the step-son of [redacted] used the name of [redacted] in high school and subsequently moved to League City. T-1 stated he would make further inquiries and report any positive information.

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PRESTON J. HASSELL  
Address Unknown

On January 7, 1957, the Dallas Office advised as follows:

Inquiries on January 3, 1957, by Special Agent CURTIS L. PERRYMAN at Jacksonville, Texas, to locate PRESTON J. HASSELL, were negative.

T-2, who has furnished reliable information in the past, advised that his records do not reflect that this man is now, or has in the past, received mail at Jacksonville. He contacted T-3, who has furnished reliable information in the past, and advised that PRESTON J. HASSELL is unknown to T-3. He advised that a FRANK E. HASSELL, who is an elderly man, lived on Route No. 4 for many years.

Mr. and Mrs. FRANK E. HASSELL, who presently reside at 611 Sunset Street, Jacksonville, Texas, advised that they had lived on Route No. 4 for over 30 years. They knew of no one named PRESTON J. HASSELL and advised that if this man had lived in the area any length of time, they feel that they would have known or recalled him.

Mr. LEALON HASSELL, United Gas Company, Jacksonville, Texas, advised that he knows of no one named PRESTON J. HASSELL, and that as far as he knows, he and FRANK E. HASSELL, and their respective families (who are not related), are the only people by that name in the community.

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Mrs. JACK CULLISON, Retail Merchants Credit Bureau, advised that she has no record of a PRESTON J. HASSELL having resided in Jacksonville or vicinity. She advised that a person named [redacted] had, in 1955, lived on [redacted] Palestine, Texas, near the community of Neches, Texas. This man moved to Morgan City, Louisiana, in September, 1955, leaving a series of uncollected debts, and that his creditors had been unsuccessful in locating him. She did not know whether this man was identical with PRESTON J. HASSELL.

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JAMES CLOISE WOMACK;  
LEROY HASKELL WOMACK

On December 27, 1956, the Little Rock Office advised that on December 20, 1956, Mrs. ANNA BELLE WOMACK, mother of JAMES CLOISE WOMACK, and Mrs. ROSS WOMACK, aunt, both of Murfreesboro, Arkansas, advised that JAMES CLOISE WOMACK recently moved to Dallas, Texas. They stated they have not received any letters from WOMACK or obtained his address since his arrival in Dallas, but expect to hear from him in the near future.

They also indicated he did not leave any forwarding address and they knew of no way to contact him at the present time. Both indicated they would advise upon obtaining the address of WOMACK.

G&H TOWING COMPANY

The following three individuals are all employed by G&H Towing Company, 802 U. S. National Bank Building, Galveston, Texas. This company also has an office at Pier 10, Galveston, Texas, where its tug boats are normally docked. This company received communications on the date of the blast from the Lykes Bros. Steamship Company concerning dispatching tugs to that area.

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Captain H. O. WEATHERBEE  
4 Dowling Circle  
LaMarque, Texas  
Telephone: 3-2734

On January 9, 1957, Captain WEATHERBEE was interviewed in his office in the U. S. National Bank Building. Captain WEATHERBEE reviewed the information which he supplied to Special Agent MAURICE H. PRICE on March 7, 1948, at Galveston, Texas, (no statement taken). Captain WEATHERBEE advised that this information was correct. The interview as recorded in 1948 is as follows:

"General Experience

"This witness will testify that the G&H Towing Company is an operating company which operates tug boats for the Bay Towing Company. The office of the latter concern is in the Haden Building, Galveston, Texas. Captain E. H. GOODWIN was his Port Captain and Dead Ship Pilot.

"Pertinent Period

"Captain WEATHERBEE will testify that on April 16, 1947, shortly after 9:00 AM, he was at his desk in the Haden Building, Galveston, Texas, dictating to a stenographer when suddenly the pane of the window above his desk came down and fell over his head. This was caused by the explosion of the GrandCamp in Texas City, Texas. He immediately telephoned Pier 10 at Galveston and learned there were no tugs at Texas City, Texas. He instructed Mr. WILLIAM D. LUDLOW, Office Assistant to Captain E. H. GOODWIN, his Port Captain, to have two tugs proceed to Texas City for the purpose of rendering aid. He instructed that the personnel on the boats should protect themselves. The Tugs Albatross and Propeller proceeded to Texas City where they picked up and brought back to Galveston, Texas survivors to be hospitalized.

"This witness will state that about eight or nine o'clock on April 16, 1947, he was contacted by Mr. TOMPKINS of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company, who advised that difficulty was being experienced at Texas City because rescue workers were afraid to go into the warehouse near the High Flyer, which was on fire at that time, since it had been

rumored that this ship was likely to explode. Mr. TOMPKINS, accompanied by his aid, Mr. JAMISON, and Captain PHARR from the New Orleans Office of the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company, came to the wharf office of the G&H Towing Company and explained to this witness that they had been assured by chemists of the Monsanto Chemical Company that an explosion of the High Flyer was unlikely. These men agreed to go along on the tugs. Thereafter volunteers were obtained to man the tugs and four tugs proceeded to Texas City with the above named officials of Lykes Brothers. This witness did not go along. He subsequently heard another explosion later that night and was informed that the High Flyer had exploded, and that there were injured aboard one of his tugs.

"This witness will state that the above officials of the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company explained to him that the purpose in wanting to move the High Flyer was not primarily to salvage the boat but was to move the boat so that rescue workers would go into the adjacent warehouse area to look for dead and injured persons.

"Captain WEATHERBEE states that it cost \$4,201.88 to have the Tug J. R. Guyton, which was one of the tugs that went to Texas City, repaired following the explosion."

Captain WEATHERBEE stated he would like to elaborate concerning his being contacted by Mr. TOMPKINS on the evening of April 16, 1947. Captain WEATHERBEE states he knows he was contacted on that night by Mr. TOMPKINS but does not recall positively whether it was in person at his home or it was a telephonic contact. He believes, however, that Mr. TOMPKINS called him on the telephone. During this conversation WEATHERBEE advised TOMPKINS that he would not order the men over in the vicinity of the HIGHFLYER and WILSON B. KEENE because of the conditions in that area. By the conditions in that area, he meant that one vessel had already blown up and there was a possibility that other explosions would occur in the area. WEATHERBEE stated that he took this stand at that time because no lives were in danger which his men on the tug boat could save and the only thing to his knowledge which could come out of such a trip would be that some of his men could be killed while on the tug.



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Captain WEATHERBEE stated that after he refused to order his men to the area Mr. TOMPKINS asked him if he could talk to the men who would man the tug boats. As a result Captain WEATHERBEE agreed to meet TOMPKINS at Pier 10 to talk to the men.

Captain WEATHERBEE stated that the remainder of his contacts with Mr. TOMPKINS and the other officials from Lykes Brothers are as previously recorded.

Captain WEATHERBEE permitted his men to volunteer on the evening of April 16, 1947, to take tugs out to the KEENE and HIGHFLYER because he was assured that the chemists from Monsanto Chemical Company had advised that an explosion was unlikely and that the Lykes Brothers officials in order to prove this to the crew of the tug stated they were willing to go along with the tug to show the men there was no danger.

Captain WEATHERBEE further advised that he never received any requests to dispatch tugs to the area of the GRANDCAMP prior to its explosion. He stated, however, that some of his tugs were dispatched to the area as previously recorded.

Captain WEATHERBEE stated that the G&H Towing Company was the only company operating in the Galveston - Texas City area at the time of the explosion which had tugs in operation. He stated there was another company, but to his knowledge they were not operating tugs at that time. Captain WEATHERBEE stated due to the lapse of time he could supply no other information.

WILLIAM BAINES LUDLOW  
157 Lee Drive  
LaMarque, Texas  
Telephone: 3-6186

On January 9, 1957, WILLIAM LUDLOW was interviewed at 802 U. S. National Bank Building, where he is employed as an office clerk of the G&H Towing Company. WILLIAM LUDLOW read the signed statement which he furnished on March 9, 1948, at Galveston, Texas, to Special Agent MAURICE H. PRICE



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and agreed that it is correct. This statement reads as follows:

"Galveston, Texas.  
March 9, 1948.

"I, William B. Ludlow, make the following statement to Maurice H. Price, Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"I live at 4817 Q 1/2 Rear, Galveston, and am employed by the G&H Towing Company as assistant to the Port Captain, E. H. Goodwin, working in the office on pier 10.

"On April 16, 1947 I received a long distance call shortly prior to 8:30 A from some man who said he was calling from the railway terminal at Texas City and he said there was a boat on fire at Texas City and wanted a couple tugs sent over. He was unable to give me the name of the boat that was on fire. I did not get the name of the man who called.

"From our office at pier 10 I could see the flames and smoke from Texas City. I called the Galveston Texas City Pilots and asked them to notify Lykes Bros. I then called the Galveston Fire Department.

"The message that a ship was afire at Texas City was relayed by radio through the Galveston Texas City Pilots to Captain Goodwin, who was on the bridge of a vessel being moved. Goodwin ordered the Albatross and propeller to go to Texas City.

"I received a telephone call from Captain Townsend of Lykes Bros. who wanted me to send two fire fighting tugs to Texas City. I told him that we were sending two tugs over there. Our company has a contract with the Lykes Bros. SS Company, and the SS Highflyer and SS William B. Keene, both

Lykes boats, were at the docks at Texas City. The SS Grandcamp of the French Lines was under contract with the Intercoastal Towing and Transportation Co., another tug company. Mr. Henry Opperman of Intercoastal called me and wanted tugs sent over to Texas City, as they had no boats available. I told him we were sending tugs over regardless of what boats were involved. At that time it was not known what boat was on fire.

"About 9:15 or 9:30 AM I received a call from Mr. Westerman of the E. S. Binnings Co., agents for the French Lines. Mr. Westerman wanted to check with me on the time he had previously called me requesting to have tugs sent to Texas City. I did not recall having talked with Mr. Westerman previously that morning, and told him so. I told him that I had talked with Mr. Opperman about the tugs going over. He insisted that he had talked to me. I inquired of Mr. John Teller, the mate of the C. R. Haden, and who had been in the office with me and Mr. Teller did not recall having received a call from Mr. Westerman.

"The SS Grandcamp blew up before the tugs Albatross and Propeller reached Texas City. The boats radioed this information back. I then called Captain Weatherbee of our office, and he told me to have the boats go in and render what assistance they could - for the men to protect themselves. I passed these instructions on to the boats.

"The boats picked up what survivors they could. They could not get to the docks at Texas City. Survivors were picked up from the water and from a dike. The tugs then returned to Galveston where the survivors were taken ashore and to hospitals.

"As the coast guard had arrived at Texas City, and as there were no further request for tugs at Texas City and there was considerable work at Galveston, our tugs did not go back to Texas City.

"I went off duty at 6:00 PM, and had nothing to do with dispatching tugs to Texas City later that day.

/s/ "WILLIAM B. LUDLOW

"Witness:

/s/ "MAURICE H. PRICE  
Special Agent FBI."

WILLIAM LUDLOW stated that the G&H Towing Company operated all the tugs in the Galveston area in 1947 with the exception of those tugs operated by the Intercoastal Towing and Transportation Company which has an office located on the Fifth Floor of the U. S. National Bank Building. LUDLOW stated that to his knowledge the IT&T Company was not called at the time of the explosion for assistance in supplying tugs. LUDLOW explained that he normally worked in 1947 at Pier 10 at the G&H Towing Company from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. During the morning hours of April 16, 1947, all of the tugs of G&H were out working with the exception of one which was under repair at the time.

LUDLOW stated that two tugs were sent after the first explosion and that the Albatross, one of these two tugs, was approximately fifteen to twenty minutes distance away from the GRANDCAMP when it blew up. The tug called Propeller was approximately thirty minutes' travelling time away from the explosion when it occurred. LUDLOW stated that in addition to the facts enumerated above, he does not recall any request being made to his knowledge of the G&H Towing Company to move the other two vessels after the GRANDCAMP exploded. LUDLOW went off watch later than normal that night and he knew that about 9:30 two of the G&H tugs went to the vicinity of the WILSON B. KEENE and HIGHFLYER; however, he, LUDLOW, did not have personal knowledge of it. LUDLOW stated that no record was now available of the calls received on the day of the explosion. It is possible that some log could have been maintained on that day, but has since been destroyed; however, LUDLOW feels that because of the fact that things happened in a hurry that day, the log was not maintained to show the accurate events as they occurred.

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EREAL H. GOODWIN  
4408 Avenue T  
Galveston, Texas  
Telephone: 5-7534

On January 10, 1957, Captain GOODWIN was interviewed at the office of G&H Towing Company, Pier 10, Galveston, Texas. He is the Port Captain for that company and is also a pilot. Captain GOODWIN reviewed the signed statement which he furnished to Special Agent M. H. PRICE on March 8, 1948, at Galveston, Texas, and advised it is correct. This statement reads as follows:

"Galveston, Texas,  
March 8, 1948:

"I, Ereal H. Goodwin, make the following voluntary statement to M. H. Price, Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"I live at 3415 P 1/2, Galveston, and am employed by the G & H Towing Co. as Port Captain.

"On April 16, 1947 I was on a job moving a ship from the Todd Drydock to Pier 5. While we were moving this ship into the slip at pier 5 there was an explosion. This was about 9:00A. I could see smoke from Texas City, but did not know then what had caused the explosion. I returned to the tug office on pier 10.

"After returning to the pier I learned from Mr. Ludlow that two tugs had been dispatched for Texas City, and I understand they were enroute when the explosion occurred.

"There were no other tugs dispatched during the day for Texas City, until I received a telephone call about 9:30 PM at home from Mr. Tompkins of the Lykes Bros. SS Company. I also received a call from Capt. Weatherbee of our company. Tompkins wanted tugs to go to Texas City to move the SS Highflyer out of the slip.

"At about 10:30 PM I left pier 10 aboard the tug J. R. Guyton. On board in addition to the crew and the Captain Mr. Gilder, were Captain Farr and Mr. Jamieson of the Lykes Bros. SS Company. They were from the New Orleans office of the company. Other tugs which went over were the Albatross, the Clark and the Miraflores. After arriving at Texas City we tried to move the SS Highflyer by pulling on the anchor chain. The starboard anchor was down. The boat could not be moved. Aboard the Albatross were some of Lykes regular shore gang who had cutting equipment. While they were cutting the anchor chain, myself, Captain Farr, Mr. Jamieson and two longshoremen went aboard the SS Highflyer. The deck was hot and the smoke was so thick that it was difficult to breathe. Sulphur was burning on the boat.

"The Guyton tried to move the Highflyer after the anchor chain was cut, but could not. I then told Captain Gilder on the Guyton to take us off the Highflyer, which he did. The other tugs were ordered back to Galveston. The Guyton was about two ship lengths from the Highflyer when she blew up. The tug Miraflores returned and towed the Guyton back to Galveston. The Guyton was damaged and was later sent to the drydock for repairs.

/s/ "E. H. GOODWIN

"Witness:

/s/ "MAURICE H. PRICE  
Special Agent - FBI."

Captain GOODWIN stated as he now recalls it he had previously moved the HIGHFLYER into its position at the time of the explosion on April 12, 1947. At the time of the explosion on April 16, 1947, he was in the process of moving a vessel known as the PAUL REVERE, which was a troop transport being converted. GOODWIN went on to state that as far as he knew no one was called by Lykes Brothers during the day of April 16 concerning the moving of ships. He did, however, relate again the events which took place on the evening

of April 16 when it was dispatched to the vicinity of the WILSON B. KEENE HIGHFLYER. Captain GOODWIN cannot now recall ever being contacted by any officers or officials of the company who operated the GRANDCAMP and as far as he knows no one was made for tugs to be dispatched to the vicinity of the GRANDCAMP by anyone.

He met Captain WEATHERBEE and TOMPKINS in the evening of April 16, 1947. During the conversation TOMPKINS said that there was ammonium nitrate aboard one of the vessels but that some chemist had stated it would not blow up. GOODWIN stated the men volunteered to go and that he, GOODWIN, went along with them but at the time he was against going, but felt he should go if the men went. GOODWIN stated there is no log or record of calls made on April 16, 1947, and that the only other company which could have operated tugs in that area at that time was Intercoastal.

Captain GOODWIN elaborated on his signed statement stating that it was his fear of an impending explosion which caused him to order his men from the HIGHFLYER and to order the tug out of the area just prior to the explosion. Captain GOODWIN stated that he could not now recall specifically what caused him to have this fear at that time but feels it was the general conditions aboard the HIGHFLYER.

#### OTHER TOWING COMPANIES

On January 11, 1957, HENRY C. OPPERMANN, JR., was interviewed at his office where he is manager of the Intercoastal Towing and Transportation Company, U. S. National Bank Building, Galveston, Texas. Mr. OPPERMANN stated that at the time of the Texas City explosion his company and the G&H Towing Company were the only two tug boat operating companies in the Galveston area; however, the Intercoastal was on strike at the time of the blast and all the tugs were tied up in Houston. OPPERMANN stated, therefore, that the only operating tug company at the time of the explosion was the G&H. OPPERMANN stated further that he did not receive any calls at the time of the blast or thereafter to supply tugs to the vicinity of the blast.

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W. A. SANDBERG

On January 3, 1957, W. J. WHITBURN, NA, Chief of Detectives, Galveston Police Department, advised that W. A. SANDBERG is employed as General Manager of the Galveston Wharf Company, 2402 Mechanic Street, Galveston, Texas. He resides at 119 Ninth Avenue North, Texas City, Texas.

EARL EVERETT DANNAR;  
CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR

On January 22, 1957, EARL DANNAR telephonically contacted Special Agent JOSEPH J. DOOLING at which time he advised he now resides at 2019 N $\frac{1}{2}$  Street (Rear), Galveston, Texas. He is employed as a longshoreman in the Galveston area working out of Local 307, Screwmen's Hall, Mechanic Street, Galveston, Texas. He stated that his father, CLARENCE RICHARD DANNAR, operates the Bluebonnet Tavern on the Temple-Waco Road and he believes he gets his mail at General Delivery, Troy, or General Delivery, Eddy, Texas.

ERNEST TILLMAN GLOVER

On January 3, 1957, the Dallas Office advised that inquiries at Troup, Texas, to locate ERNEST TILLMAN GLOVER whose former address was Route 4, Troup, Texas, has proved negative.

On November 26, 1956, T-3 and T-4, both of whom have furnished reliable information in the past, advised that GLOVER is not at and to the best of their knowledge has never received mail at the Troup Post Office, unless it was in care of some other person. The Retail Merchants Credit Bureau had no record of this man.

SURVIVING GRANDCAMP CREW MEMBERS

The following investigation was conducted at Washington, D.C.:

The records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reflect that ROGER L'ABBE was listed as a steward on the SS LIBERTE when that vessel arrived in New York City on August 3, 1956. His residence was given as 17 vis Rue de Phalsbourg, Le Havre, France, and his birth date as June 3, 1909.

INS records contain no information concerning the entry into the United States of MAURICE L. Le BROZEC or GUY SAUCEY since they were members of the crew of the GRANDCAMP on April 16, 1947. These records contain no information regarding JULIAN GUERIL and ALBERT DULONG.

SUDERMAN STEVEDORING COMPANY

On January 10, 1957, and January 22, 1957, ADOLPH DONALD SUDERMAN, JR., was interviewed at Pier 35. His residence is 2920 O Street, Galveston, Texas, Telephone 3-4359. ADOLPH SUDERMAN advised he is presently the operator of SUDERMAN Stevedoring Company and that that company was loading the GRANDCAMP on the day it exploded. He stated, however, that Suderman Stevedoring Company did not load the cargo on the HIGHFLYER. The HIGHFLYER was loaded by the Southern Stevedoring Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Lykes Bros. Steamship Company.

ADOLPH SUDERMAN stated that the Suderman Stevedoring Company was employed as an independent contractor and had an oral contract with the French Company to load the vessels belonging to that French company. SUDERMAN stated, however, that Suderman Stevedoring got their contract through Binnings, the agents for the French Line to load various French Line vessels. ADOLPH SUDERMAN explained that the stevedoring company had agreed upon the rate for the cargo to be loaded and as for the rest of the contract it was handled by custom or practice in the shipping industries. Therefore, no specific details were set forth and each side knew what was expected of them.

ADOLPH SUDERMAN advised the Chief Officer of a vessel is normally aboard to supervise the loading of the vessel. It is not customary to send a company representative aboard to



supervise such loading but by practice the Chief Officer or the ranking officer aboard the vessel normally handles it. ADOLPH SUDERMAN stated he did not supervise the loading of the GRANDCAMP but that his brother, C. PETER SUDERMAN, did. However, ADOLPH SUDERMAN knows from his own knowledge in such cases that no special instructions were given.

ADOLPH SUDERMAN stated that by custom broken sacks were left on the dock. If the sacks were broken in the hold the stevedoring company would take them out of the hold and they would be re-sacked later.

ADOLPH SUDERMAN advised that he supervised the loading of the Lt. J. LEMEURE, previously referred to in this report. In that instance the Chief Officer instructed the men not to smoke. This is customary in the dock area regardless of the cargo; however, aside from the normal practice the crew and officers of that vessel did nothing which would show that they controlled the details of the loading. He further advised that this ammonium nitrate aboard the Lt. J. LEMEURE was handled much the same as flour and that the precautions taken for loading flour would normally apply to precautions taken when loading ammonium nitrate on Lt. J. LEMEURE. ADOLPH SUDERMAN advised that he would cooperate in this matter but did not desire to give a signed statement at this time.

Attention is directed to the interview of C. PETER SUDERMAN, Page 7 of this report, who was the supervisor of the loading of the GRANDCAMP on the date of its explosion.

#### LYKES BROS. STEAMSHIP COMPANY EMPLOYEES

On January 11, 1957, CHARLES KESSLER, Manager of Dannar Marine Guard Service, U. S. National Bank Building, advised that A. S. GLADWIN, JR., is a Vice-president of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company in Houston, Texas, and resides at 4513 Pine Street, Bellaire, Texas.

On January 11, 1957, CHARLES KESSLER advised that J. C. TOMPKINS is a Vice-president of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company, Galveston, Texas, and resides at 4511 Sherman Street, Galveston.

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CHARLES KESSLER on January 11, 1957, advised he had heard that JAMES B. PHARR was residing at 4413 Stillbrook Street, believed to be in Houston, Texas. He further stated that PHARR had opened a bar known as Pharr's Pilot's Bar, Yokohama, Japan, some four or five years ago, he had returned to the States, gone to Europe, and subsequently returned to Japan. He does not know if he is still operating the bar in Yokohama.

On January 23, 1957, Miss ALLIE FUTRELL, Credit Bureau of Greater Houston, advised there is no record of a JAMES B. PHARR in her organization or in the City Directories, Telephone Book, or Kriss-Kross, and it does not appear there is a 4400 block of Stillbrook Street in Houston, Texas.

On January 22, 1957, the records of the Judge Advocate General's office, Galveston, Texas, reflected that JAMES B. PHARR was a claimant in the Texas City disaster and at the time of filing his claim he gave the address care of D. W. PHARR, 4107 Barry Knoll Drive, Los Angeles 65, California.

- P -

ADMINISTRATIVE

The various individuals interviewed in order to locate the interviewees reported herein are not being set forth; however, the dates of such investigation are included in the period of this report. In addition, the pertinent portions of Departmental memoranda were set forth in detail in this report, together with the signed statement taken in 1948 or the interview recorded in 1948 in connection with the Texas City Disaster case, in view of the fact that this was a separate file.

INFORMANTS

- T-1 [redacted] Texas City, Texas, whose identity should not be revealed.
- T-2 [redacted] Jacksonville, Texas, whose identity should not be revealed.
- T-3 [redacted] Troup, Texas, whose identity should not be revealed.
- T-4 [redacted] Troup, Texas, whose identity should not be revealed.

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LEADS

DALLAS

AT PALESTINE, TEXAS

Will attempt to locate PRESTON J. HASSELL, Route 4, as requested in Departmental Memoranda: dated November 9 and 26, 1956, or locate HASSELL from information supplied by the Baltimore Office. It should be noted this man is a claimant in the Texas City Disaster. (This lead was previously set out by airtel dated 1/14/57 and airtel dated 12/31/56.)

LITTLE ROCK

AT MURFREESBORO, ARKANSAS

Will maintain contact with Mrs. ANNA BELLE WOMACK, mother of JAMES CLOISE WOMACK, and Mrs. ROSS WOMACK, aunt, to ascertain the current address of JAMES CLOISE WOMACK and LEROY HASKELL WOMACK, and set out leads to interview

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krs.  
HO 131-39

these individuals, as requested in Departmental Memoranda dated November 9 and 26, 1956. (This lead previously set forth in airtel dated 12/31/56.)

LOS ANGELES

AT LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Will contact D. W. PHARR, 4107 Barry Knoll Drive, Los Angeles 65, California, to ascertain the present employment and address of JAMES B. PHARR, former Marine Inspector, Lykes Bros. Steamship Company, Galveston, Texas. If JAMES B. PHARR is presently employed by Lykes Bros. Steamship Company, do not interview him, but furnish his present address and employment by report. If JAMES B. PHARR is not employed by Lykes Bros., he should be interviewed to determine his present address and employment. Also obtain from him the names, addresses and official positions of any other persons who occupied positions of managerial authority over the vessels "HIGHERFLYER" and "WILSON B. KEENE".

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NEW ORLEANS:

AT HARVEY, LOUISIANA.

Will locate and interview MARVIN SPENCER, 531 Second Street, Harvey, who is employed as a sub-contractor for Sea Engineering Salvage, doing work for Shell Oil Company on site of Protecto Kote Corporation, Peters Road, Harvey, Louisiana, as requested in Departmental Memoranda dated November 9 and 26, 1956. (This lead previously set forth by airtel dated 1/14/57).

HOUSTON:

AT GALVESTON and TEXAS CITY, TEXAS.

Will conduct investigation in order to locate WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON and interview as requested in Departmental Memoranda.

REFERENCES

Bureau letter to Houston, 11/15/56.  
Houston letter to Little Rock, 12/7/56.  
Little Rock airtel to Houston, 12/27/56.  
Houston airtels to Director, 12/31/56, 1/2/57, 1/5/57, 1/14/57, 1/15/57, 1/18/57.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>LOS ANGELES</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>2/4/57</b>	Investigative Period <b>1/30,31;2/1/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS-WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIGHFLYER; SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, April 16 &amp; 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		Report made by <b>RICHARD S. ROBERTS (A)</b>	Typed By: <b>pra</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE  <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Synopsis:

JAMES VINSON PHARR presently working for U. S. Army in Japan. PHARR's address is Kure Out-Port, Headquarters Kobe, U. S. Army Sub-Port, APO 354 c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.

- RUC -

DETAILS:

AT LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA:

On February 1, 1957, Mr. DAVID W. PHARR, 4107 Barryknoll Drive, Los Angeles, advised that his brother, JAMES VINSON PHARR, has not worked for the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company for some time. PHARR advised that his brother had been a Merchant Marine Captain, but subsequent to the Texas incident he had suffered a heart attack and could no longer ship out. PHARR stated that his brother has been working for the United States Army in Japan for the past 4 or 5 years and to his knowledge his brother has no plans to return to the United States, at least not in the near future.

Approved <i>[Signature]</i>	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made: 2 - Bureau (131-363) 3 - Houston (131-39) (1-USA, Houston) 1 - Los Angeles (131-58)		131-363-28	RECORDED-13
		2 FEB 8 1957	

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PHARR furnished JAMES VINSON PHARR's present address as Kure Out-Port, Headquarters Kobe, U. S. Army Sub-Port, APO 354 c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, California.

- RUC -

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REFERENCE

Houston Airtel to the Bureau dated 1/24/57.

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# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>DALLAS</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>2/8/57</b>	Investigative Period <b>1/28/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, 4-16 &amp; 17-47, Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Co. and Republic of France, Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		Report made by <b>CURTIS L. PERRYMAN</b> (rd)	Typed By: <b>sm</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Synopsis:

PRESTON J. HASSELL, Neches, Texas, verified statement he made in 1948, and makes no corrections or additions thereto. Recalls loading ammonium nitrate on one other vessel, but does not know date, or name or registry of vessel.

-P-

DETAILS: AT NECHES, TEXAS

The statement furnished by PRESTON J. HASSELL on March 20, 1948, is set forth as follows:

"Palestine, Texas  
March 20, 1948

"I, Preston J. Hassell, Rt 4, Jacksonville, Texas, do make this voluntary statement to Norval D. Wills, Special Agent of the F.B.I. and knowing it may be used in Court.

"I have worked as a longshoreman at the Texas

Approved <i>W.A. Mason</i>	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made: 2 - BUREAU (131-363) 3 - HOUSTON (131-39) (Encl-4) (1 - USA) (RM) 2 - DALLAS (131-7)		13 12 FEB 1957	RECORDED - 70

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City Terminal off and on for about 3 years. My brother J. B. Hassell and I worked regular as longshoremen at the Terminal since January 16, 1947.

"I have loaded ammonium nitrate on boats only twice, one boat was the Grand Camp and I don't remember the name of the other boat. At no time did anybody tell me ammonium nitrate fertilizer was dangerous, that it would or that it would explode. The only instructions given me was how to stack it.

"From the time the Grand Camp started taking on ammonium nitrate fertilizer I worked in Number 4 hatch. In fact I helped rig the boat for cargo when it came in. In number 4 hatch my crew loaded fertilizer on the second deck. The bottom deck already had cargo and dunnage had been laid over this cargo. Also, the dunnage had been covered with paper. This is unusual as ordinarily the bottom of the hatch is inspected and the loading crew logs the dunnage after the inspection. "Swede" Sandberg had in the past inspected every boat I have worked on, but he did not inspect or even come on deck of the Grand Camp. I loaded fertilizer in hatch 4 of the Grand Camp from the time it docked until April 16, 1947. My shift was the dog shift and I worked on the off-shore side with my brother, J. B. Hassell, a man named Hattenback and "Blackie" Hutchison; on the inshore side there were two Mexicans and two other men, whose names I don't recall.

"On April 15, 1947, I worked in Hatch 4 with the same crew. Our hours were from 8 to 5. Everything was all right when we knocked off at 5 o'clock this day. We left one loaded tray in the hatch and covered up for the night. There was no sign of fire when we closed up. At 12 midnight April 15, 1947 I went to work for Dannar, foreman of number 3 hatch. We were loading ammonium nitrate in this hatch. One of the Ballen boys, Winford Main, Earl Dannar, a Womack boy are those I remember working in the hatch. I got off this job at 6 in the morning. In hatch 3 nothing went wrong during the night so far as I know. No fires or indication of fire in this hatch during the night.

"At 8 in the morning of April 16, 1947, I reported back to hatch 4 of the Grand Camp. We took the cover off the hatch and went down. Within 15 minutes after we got

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in the hatch, Hutchison said he smelled smoke. This was while the off-shore side was unloading its tray that was already down, and the in-shore side was waiting for a tray. We started looking for fire and saw some smoke that looked about like cigaret smoke. We could not feel the deck floor because we were about 8 sacks from the floor. When we saw the smoke, we started moving the bags to locate the fire. My brother poured some water between the wall boards and the hull of the ship. After we had moved some of the sacks of fertilizer, the floor caved in and it looked like a hole was made big enough for 2 automobiles. Somebody stuck a hose over the top of the hatch but no water came out. The French Captain fussed at my brother for using water saying it would ruin the fertilizer. Some French sailors came down with fire extinguishers but they did no good. The fire got so hot that we came out of the hatch. All the French crew came out too. On top deck we covered the hatch, then put 3 tarps over the cover and then put the steel braces over the tarps. Somebody had told us to do this so steam could be turned into the hatch. After we covered up, the French Captain ordered us to Number 5 hatch to unload some boxes. Five of us went in the hold, I, my brother J. B., Hutchison and a couple of others went down; Bill Corbett and Jim Douglas were hauling the rope up. We tied the rope to the boxes and they pulled the boxes up. A couple of the boxes fell and broke. These boxes contained 45 ammunition and one box had shells about 6 inches long and an inch and half in diameter. I don't know what was written on the boxes but the top deck of Number 5 hatch was filled. The big ammunition looked like anti-tank or anti-aircraft shells. I don't know how long we were in hatch 5. It got so hot that we left. The top deck was so hot we could hardly walk on it. We went down the gang-plank at mid-ship onto the wharf and walked away from the boat toward the road. The fire department was on the boat when I left. When my brother and I got about 10 feet from the road, there was an explosion. I did not hear the noise, but I was knocked into the water in the slip. I climbed out of the water to the bank and then went blank. In the water, I saw a timber coming toward me but I warded it off with my arm and it grazed my head. My brother, J. B. Hassell was killed and I have his watch which stopped at 9:09 A.M. The watch was running when we started to work on 4/16/47 and was smashed during the explosion.

"While I worked in hatch 4 of the Grand Camp I did not see any of the crew smoking-I know none of the crew on the off shore side smoked and I did not see any of the

DL - 131-7

boys on the inshore side smoking. Various members of the French crew would look over the hatch while smoking.

"I do not know what cargo was on the deck below the nitrate in Number 4 hatch. My observation in hatch 4 leads me to believe the fire started below the second deck as the dunnage to the second deck caved in. When the cave in occurred, a blue looking flame rolled up with the smoke.

"In loading the nitrate in Number 4 hatch if a sack tore, we just turned the torn place so the French could not see it. Any spillage was left where it was and we would cover it with other sacks. If a sack was torn so bad, we would put the sack and all between the wall board and the skin of the ship.

"The only other cargo on the Grand Camp was some peanuts, ammunition and some acid. The acid was in the top deck of Number 3 hatch. I saw this acid while I worked in Number 3 hatch.

"I have read these five pages and it is true.

"Preston J. Hassell.

"Witness: Norval D. Wills  
Sp. Agt. F.B.I., Houston, Tex."

Mr. PRESTON J. HASSELL, whose present address is in care of General Delivery, Neches, Anderson County, Texas, advised on January 28, 1957, that he is presently farming for a living and expects to reside at the above address indefinitely.

Mr. HASSELL read the statement he had furnished on March 20, 1948, and advised that he had no corrections or additions to make to this statement. In that statement he advised that he had loaded ammonium nitrate on one other vessel besides the SS GRANDCAMP, but he is unable to recall the date of this loading or the name or registry of the vessel loaded.

Mr. HASSELL advised that he did not know to what extent the crew controlled the details of the loading in this matter and said that he worked under a longshoreman foreman and that this man was the only one who gave him any

DL - 131-7

orders. He said that the longshoremen had orders not to smoke in the hold of any ship they were working on, even when loading such items as pig iron. These orders, he said, came from his own foreman. He advised that he had never seen anyone smoking in the hold of any ship except on one occasion in mid January, 1947, when one employee was fired for smoking in the hold. He did not recall the name of this man, or the name of the ship being loaded, nor could he recall the nature of the cargo being handled.

ENCLOSURES TO HOUSTON: Signed statement of PRESTON J. HASSELL, dated March 20, 1948, and photostatic copies of pages 625, 626, and 627 of the report of SA JAMES C. FINLEY, dated April 24, 1956, Houston, reporting interview of this individual.

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REFERENCES

Houston letter dated 12/7/56;  
Dallas letter dated 1/7/57;  
Houston letter dated 1/14/57;  
Baltimore letter dated 1/23/57.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON

(Your file 131-39)

DATE: 3-4-57

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI

(Bufile and serial 131-363-30)

S.S. WILSON B. KEENE - fcc

SUBJECT: ADMIRALTY MATTER

Office of Origin: Ho

1. ( ) The deadline in this case has passed and the Bureau has not received a report. You are instructed to submit a report immediately. In the event a report has been submitted, you should make a notation of the date on which it was submitted on this letter and return it to the Bureau, Room No. \_\_\_\_\_

Report submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Report will be submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for delay \_\_\_\_\_

2. ( ) Advise Bureau re status of this case.
3. ( ) Advise Bureau when report may be expected.

4. (✓) Surep immediately. re completion of all investigation

(Place your reply on this form and return to the Bureau. Note on the top serial in the case file the receipt and acknowledgment of this communication.)

131-39

SEARCHED.....	INDEXED.....
SERIALIZED.....	FILED.....
MAR 5 1957	
FBI - HOUSTON	

Assistant Attorney General  
George Cochran Doub

February 13, 1957

Director, FBI

RECORDED

72 131-363-30

SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.

ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTERS

(Department Files 61-17923, 61-17924 and 61-18031)

Reference is made to the Bureau's memorandum dated December 7, 1956, in the captioned matters.

The following information was received from

on January 28, 1957:

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Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
Rosen \_\_\_\_\_  
Tamm \_\_\_\_\_  
Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

131-363

1 - Houston (131-39)

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(5)

COMM - FBI

FEB 13 1957

MAILED 20



Assistant Attorney General  
George Cochran Egan

b7D

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It is noted that the reply from [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] failed to include information concerning [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] A further attempt will be made to secure this  
information, which will be forwarded to you.



THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
• American Embassy  
Paris 8, France

Date: January 31, 1957  
To: Director, FBI (131-363)  
From: Legat, Paris (62-10)  
Subject: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

ReBulet 11/15/56.

The following information was obtained from [redacted] on 1/25/57:

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EX-117

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INDEXED

17 FEB 1957

2-13-57

gkP 196

Director

1/31/57

It is noted that the reply from [redacted] failed to include information concerning [redacted] A further attempt will be made to secure this information, which will be immediately forwarded to the Bureau.

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"of investigation VINCENT E. DRAIN and EMMET J. MURPHY. I have been advised that this statement may be used in a Court of Law as evidence at a later date.

"I worked as a longshoreman and warehouseman at the Texas City Terminal Railroad Docks from January 4, 1947, to April 16, 1947. During this time I handled ammonium nitrate fertilizer both as a warehouseman and a longshoreman.

" I handled the fertilizer from the box cars into the warehouse and also into the holds of boats. I had no idea that the ammonium nitrate fertilizer would explode, burn or was dangerous in any way. I was given no special instructions on how to handle this fertilizer. The ammonium nitrate fertilizer was contained in paper sacks. At times the fertilizer would spill out of the sacks where they broke in the warehouse and the sweeper would resack it. If the sacks of fertilizer broke in the holds of boats and was not too badly broken, they would stack it along with the other sacks of fertilizer. At different times when the sacks were torn in the holds of the boats and the fertilizer spilled on to the floor it would be covered up with other sacks. When these sacks were torn the sack would be thrown behind the cargo board. At different times I would throw sacks of fertilizer behind cargo boarding.

"I did not smoke at any time during this period and I never heard anyone caution the workers about smoking while around the ammonium nitrate fertilizer, however, I wish to point out there was a general rule against smoking in the warehouse and also there was a 'no smoking' sign posted in the warehouse. On different occasions I remember seeing some of the workers sneak smokes in the warehouse while handling this ammonium nitrate fertilizer and subsequently put their cigarettes out either on the floor or on the sacking of the fertilizer. I did not know of any spot which was designated for safety, explosives or otherwise set aside for storage of ammonium nitrate fertilizer in the warehouse.

"I helped load in the #4 hatch on the Grand Camp the cargo of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. I worked in the inshore side of the #4 hatch for two or three days after the ship arrived in the Port of Texas City, Texas. Others working with me in the #4 hatch were my brother, LEROY WOMACK, the HASSELL brothers and JOE MEDUSA.

"I helped lay the dunnage in the lower hold of the #4 hatch. As I recall the bottom of the board was dirty and had some pieces of wood in it. After laying the dunnage they placed heavy paper over it. I remember while working in the #4 hatch of the Grand Camp loading ammonium nitrate fertilizer I saw some of the gang in the #4 hold smoking. I noticed that they would lay their cigarettes on the bags of the fertilizer and most of the time in putting these cigarettes out they would step on them. At other times they would rub the cigarettes out on the cargo boards. I can not personally state that I saw anyone throw a cigarette behind a cargo board. I recall observing bags of fertilizer being torn while being loaded in the #4 hatch of the Grand Camp and as I have previously stated after the bags were badly torn the bag would be stacked along with the good bags. If the sweeper was not around the spilled fertilizer it would be covered up with other bags. Also I remember, that if the bags of the fertilizer were badly torn up they were just thrown behind the cargo boards. I remember hearing on different occasions fertilizer going down the side of the boat to the bottom. I personally remember throwing a torn end from a bag of fertilizer behind the cargo board in the #4 hatch of the Grand Camp. On April 15, 1947, I worked in the warehouse O along with my brother, LEROY and SHORTY WORTHY. They were loading trays of ammonium nitrate fertilizer to go into #4 hatch of the Grand Camp. Their hours were from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. On April 14, 1947, at quitting time I helped cover up the #4 hatch of the Grand Camp and as far as I observed there was nothing wrong. I reported to work at 8:00 AM on April 16, 1947, at Warehouse O. After they had loaded two or three trays of ammonium nitrate and put them into the wharf my foreman BOSWELL called me along with the others on the deck of the Grand Camp. This was around 8:20 AM. BOSWELL said there was a fire

"in the hold. I got on top of the deck of the Grand Camp and noted some smoke coming from the #4 hatch. It was a dark gray color. I looked into the #4 hatch into the hold and saw some of the French crew with fire extinguishers. I saw a little water put on the fire. I could also see some smoke coming from between the sacks of fertilizer. As I got on top of the deck I heard someone say to cover the hatch up as the water would damage the cargo and they were going to use steam.

"The man in the #4 hatch came out and they covered up the hatch and wedged the tarpaulins as tight as they could. Someone turned on the steam and the tarpaulins began to swell. They placed dunnage and everything heavy they could get on the covers to keep them down. BOSWELL then told us to get off of the ship as there was nothing else that could be done. At that time a lot of reddish color smoke was coming from the #4 hatch. I left the Grand Camp and walked up the walk to where my car was parked. I was with my brother and someone else whose name I do not recall. We got in my car and moved about 200 yards away. I went back to the road at the end of the wharf and observed the fire engines as they drove up. The explosion occurred about ten to twenty minutes later.

"I observed just before the explosion the smoke was red color and the flame was red also. There was no building burning and the only fire I saw was on the Grand Camp.

"The explosion knocked me about fifteen to twenty yards. Fragments started falling and hit me and knocked me unconscious. Water and oil covered me. I finally managed to get up and CLARENCE DANNER took me to the Clinic at Texas City. I suffered three broken fingers on my right hand. My left ankle and back were injured and my right leg was also cut.

"This statement on this page and four others are true and correct to the best of my memory.

"s/JAMES CLOISE WOMACK

"Witnesses

"s/VINCENT E. DRAIN, Special Agent, F.B.I., Dallas, Texas

"s/EMMET J. MURPHY, Special Agent, F.B.I., Dallas, Texas

2/12/57"

ENCLOSURES TO HOUSTON (2)

1 copy of signed statement of WOMACK. (JAMES CLOISE).

1 copy of signed statement of LEROY HASKELL WOMACK.

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DL 131-7

REFERENCES

Report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING (A) dated February 4,  
1957, at Houston.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE



Assistant Attorney General  
George Cochran Doub

March 4, 1957

Director, FBI

SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER  
(Department Files 61-17923, 61-17924, 61-18031)

Reference is made to the Bureau's memorandum dated February 13, 1957, which furnished information regarding the present whereabouts of certain employees and former employees of the French Lines.

	has now advised that

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This completes the inquiries in France which were requested by the Civil Division.

131-333-32

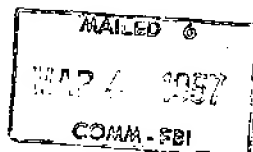
1 - Houston (131-39)

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EX-166

Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
Rosen \_\_\_\_\_  
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Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_



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EX-166

JKP

61 MAR 7 1957



GIR 2

THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Embassy  
Paris 8, France

Date: February 18, 1957  
To: Director, FBI (131-363)  
From: Legal Attache, Paris (62-10)  
Subject: SS WILSON B. KEENE.  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

Re Paris let 1/31/57.

By letter dated 2/13/57, [redacted]  
[redacted] advised that [redacted]  
[redacted]

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131-363-32  
16 FEB 26 1957

*Let AAG-Domb  
1-HO  
3-4-57 JEP:192*

DIVISION SECTION 101

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SAC, Houston (131-30)

March 21, 1957

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131-363-33  
Director, FBI (131-363)

SS WILSON D. KERNE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.

ADMIRALTY NOS. 1863, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTER

Attached for Houston and New Orleans is a copy of a Civil Division memorandum dated 3/19/57 requesting further investigation in this matter.

For the information of San Antonio, the only investigation required in that division is the location of Ben Lapham, Jr., who was second mate of the SS "Highflyer" operated by Lykes Brothers Steamship Company on April 16, 1947, at the time of the Texas City disaster. The Department requests only the determination of the current address and present employment of Lapham. Lapham's last known address was Mission, Texas.

New Orleans and Houston will locate the other persons identified in the attached memorandum. It is noted that the only persons who are to be interviewed are those listed on page 3 of instant memorandum, all of whom were last reported to be residing within the Houston Division. The other persons whose location the Department requests need not be interviewed and no interviews are to be conducted with present employees of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company.

All offices are instructed to afford this matter immediate attention and to submit reports reflecting completion of the investigation at the earliest possible date.

Enclosure

2 - New Orleans (131-35) - Enclosure

2 - San Antonio (131-5)

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Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
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Trotter \_\_\_\_\_  
Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

COMM - FBI

21 MAR 1957

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# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>SAN ANTONIO</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>3/28/57</b>	Investigative Period <b>3/26/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIGH-FLYER; SS GRANDCAMP, Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947, Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Republic of France, Southern Texas, Admiralty. Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		Report made by <b>HAROLD H. CROSSETT</b>	Typed By: <b>lmj</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Synopsis:

**BEN HERBERT LAPHAM, JR.**, Mission, Texas, died June 29, 1955. Wife, **HELEN**, [redacted] still reside [redacted] Mission, Texas.

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**DETAILS: AT McALLEN, TEXAS**

On March 26, 1957, JACK WRIGHT, Credit Bureau of McAllen, which also covers Mission, Texas, advised his files reflect that **BEN HERBERT LAPHAM, JR.**, a farmer who resided four miles north of Mission on Highway 107, died on June 29, 1955. His mailing address was shown as [redacted]

[redacted] There was no information in the Credit Bureau files as to LAPHAM's wife.

Approved <i>[Signature]</i>	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made: 2 - Bureau (131-363) (AM) 3 - Houston (131-39) 1 - San Antonio (131-5)		131	34
		RECORDED - 26	

SA 131-5

AT MISSION, TEXAS

A search of the current Rio Grande Valley Telephone Directory reflected that BEN H. LAPHAM, JR., resided four and one-quarter mile north of Mission.

On March 26, 1957, JAMES FORD, Pride Funeral Home, advised that BEN H. LAPHAM died on June 29, 1955, and was survived by [REDACTED] He continued that LAPHAM was a farmer but had been working as a carpenter at the time of his death. His widow still resides four and one-quarter miles north of Mission.

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AT EDINBURG, TEXAS

On March 26, 1957, MRS. ESTHER JIMINEZ, Hidalgo County Clerk's Office, advised the Hidalgo County Death Records reflect that BEN HERBERT LAPHAM, JR., died on June 29, 1955, at Mission, Texas. Cause of death was reflected to have been coronary occlusion.

His wife was reflected to be HELEN LAPHAM.

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SA 131-5

ADMINISTRATIVE

Three copies of this report are designated for the Houston Office in the event it is desired to furnish one copy to the United States Attorney at Houston.

REFERENCE

Bureau letter to Houston dated 3/21/57

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

SAC, Houston (131-39)

April 2, 1957

Director, FBI (131-363)

RECORDED - 1731-363-35

EX-107

SS WILSON B. KEENE, SS HIGHFLYER,  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Reurlet 3/28/57.

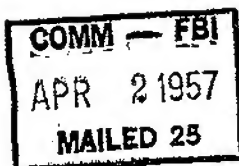
Baltimore will not be authorized to contact  
its sources at this time in an effort to locate a  
record of recent employments of [REDACTED]

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Houston should proceed with all logical  
investigation to locate [REDACTED]

2 - Baltimore

JKP:ige  
(6)



Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
Nichols \_\_\_\_\_  
Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
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Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

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60 APR 8 1957

APR 5 1957

JH

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

DATE: 3/28/57

FROM : SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
 SS HIGHFLYER  
 SS GRANDCAMP  
 Limitation of Liability,  
 April 16 and 17, 1947  
 Petitions of Lykes Bros.  
 Steamship Company and  
 Republic of France  
 Southern Texas,  
 Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
 ADMIRALTY MATTERS  
 (OO - Houston)

This office has conducted investigation to locate one [redacted] who was interviewed in connection with the Texas City disaster on 3/6/48. At that time he was [redacted] years of age and resided at [redacted] Texas City, Texas. His occupation was that of a longshoreman. Investigation revealed that he resided at this address until 1953 when his wife died, and since that time his whereabouts has been unknown. This individual, according to his Identification Record, FBI Number [redacted] was last arrested at Texas City on 1/11/53, for DWI. No other information is known concerning this man.

The Department has requested that this individual be located as a possible witness in this case. All such investigation to date has been negative.

The Bureau is requested to have the Baltimore Office check [redacted] in an effort to locate most recent employment record of this individual in order that he may be interviewed.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the Baltimore Office in the event the Bureau authorizes such investigation.

- ② - Bureau
- 2 - Baltimore
- 1 - Houston

JJD/jpf.  
 (5)

RECORDED - 17

EX-107

131-363-35



# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office HOUSTON	Office of Origin HOUSTON	Date MAR 29 1957	Investigative Period 2/11,12; 3/1,2,4,5,6/57
TITLE OF CASE 0 SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France		Report made by JOSEPH J. DOOLING (A)	Typed By: jpf
		CHARACTER OF CASE  ADMIRALTY MATTERS	

Synopsis: Southern Texas,  
Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870

Five surviving members of SS GRANDCAMP crew located. Efforts to locate WILLIAM K. THOMPSON unproductive. Various witnesses interviewed by Mr. DALE GREEN, Departmental Attorney, who advised pre trial conference to be had within next 60 days.

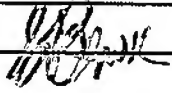
- P -

DETAILS: AT HOUSTON, TEXAS

T-1, who has supplied reliable information in the past, advised the following information was received from

on  
January 25, 1957:

b7D

Approved 	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made:  ② - Bureau (131-363) 1 - USA, Houston 2 - Houston (131-39)		131-363-36	RECORDED - 17
		15 APR 3 1957	

1 cc Dale Green  
Civil Div  
4-1-57 JPD

67 APR 9 1957

HO 131-39

b7D

On March 4, 1957, T-1 advised that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] has now advised

that [REDACTED]

On February 11, 1957, T-2, who has furnished reliable information in the past, advised that BLACKIE THOMPSON's son, GERALD E. THOMPSON, supposedly resided at 117 Pecan Street, La Marque, Texas, and has moved to

HO 131-39

Box 1285, Dickinson, Texas. Further, that NATHANIEL THOMPSON who resides at 124 21st Street, South, Texas City, Texas, may be a relative of BLACKIE THOMPSON.

On February 12, 1957, GERALD E. THOMPSON, 3406 Cedar Drive, Dickinson, Texas, was interviewed. He stated he had no relatives in the East Texas area and that he is in no way connected or related with a BLACKIE THOMPSON or a WILLIAM K. THOMPSON, and he further related that he could not understand why he should be mistaken for that man's son.

On February 12, 1957, Mrs. ANNIE DURHAM, 124 21st Street, South, Texas City, Texas, advised that she is the mother of Mrs. MAE THOMPSON; that her daughter, MAE THOMPSON married NATHANIEL THOMPSON. Mrs. DURHAM stated that her son-in-law, NATHANIEL THOMPSON had been known to her for many years and that he is not identical or related to WILLIAM K. THOMPSON.

On March 1, 1957, Mr. DALE GREEN, Departmental Attorney, in the office of the U. S. Attorney, Houston, advised he was handling this matter in the Department and had come to the Houston area for that purpose. He stated it was his intention to reinterview some of the witnesses in this case.

On March 2, 1957, Mr. GREEN interviewed JOHN HENRY HOFF at his residence in Texas City, Texas, and JULIO LUNA, JR., who resides at Arcadia, Texas.

On March 3, 1957, Mr. DALE GREEN, at Texas City, Texas, interviewed Chief of Police DE WALT, who supplied background data of the Texas City disaster.

On March 3, 1957, ALBERT DOLEZAL, who resides in Seabrook, Texas, and is employed by Pan American in Texas City was reinterviewed. The information fully supplied by DOLEZAL in 1948 is set out below:

HO 131-39

### Background of Witness

DOLEZAL is a white man of Czech descent. He is thirty-one years of age and has a slight accent. He expresses himself well, gives the impression of being honest and has an enthusiastic manner. He is presently working for the Pan-American Refineries. He was not injured by the explosion. He has been contacted by about three insurance company representatives since the explosion, but he does not know who they were nor what companies they represented.

### General Experience

This witness can testify that he has handled quite a lot of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and has loaded it on about four ships during the three months prior to April 16, 1947. He has also handled this fertilizer in the warehouses, as well as in the holds of boats. No one has ever given him any special instructions on the handling of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. He and the other longshoremen received ten cents an hour more for handling this fertilizer than certain other cargo but he understood this was because it was dusty and like cement, it was hard on the fingers. He had no idea that ammonium nitrate fertilizer was dangerous.

### Safety Regulations

This witness can testify that ammonium nitrate fertilizer was contained in paper sacks and the words, "Ammonium Nitrate" and something about a percent were on the sacks. He states that in handling these sacks of fertilizer the men would pitch them as far as they could when they loaded the holds in ships in order to get the sacks as far back as possible. When a bag would break open in the hold of a boat they would pile as much as they could of the fertilizer back in the sack. If the sack was completely broken up they would just leave it or push it aside. He said that the fertilizer was just like sand when they walked around in it. Sometimes some of the sacks would be a little warm, particularly on the bottom, but they could be handled, however, without any trouble. He said some of the sacks looked like they might have been set where it was damp as they would break pretty easy when being handled.

HO 131-39

He states that it was the general practice of the longshoremen to smoke in the holds of ships while loading ammonium nitrate fertilizer, and that he has also observed longshoremen smoking in the warehouses.

Pertinent Period

This witness will testify that he started working on the No. 4 Hatch of the Grand Camp under foreman L. D. BOSWELL on Monday, April 14, 1947. He worked from 1:00 to 5:00 PM. He worked the entire day shift on April 15, 1947, and reported to work at 8:00 AM, Wednesday, April 16, 1947. He states that they were handling ammonium nitrate fertilizer in the No. 4 Hatch of the Grand Camp. He states that the manner in which they loaded the Grand Camp with ammonium nitrate fertilizer was the same in which they had loaded other ships with the same material. It was handled in exactly the same manner. He stated on the Grand Camp there was no sack sewer the two days that he worked on it and when a bag broke open that they would pile what they could in the sack and stack it up in the hold. If the fertilizer had spilled completely out of the sack they would just leave it or push it aside. Some of the sacks were a little warm but not too hot to handle. Some of the sacks appeared to be damp on the bottom and broke easily when handled.

This witness states that he never did hear any orders about not smoking on the Grand Camp and was never told by anyone there was to be no smoking. He states there were no signs prohibiting smoking on the Grand Camp. He states that the longshoremen smoked in the No. 4 Hold on the Grand Camp.

At 8:00 AM on April 16, 1947, this witness along with others on deck of the Grand Camp uncovered the hatches. Eight of them went down in the No. 4 Hold to work, this witness being one of these. He was one of the four working on the inshore side. There was a tray sitting on the outshore side and this witness and his group were sitting or standing around waiting for a tray to be lowered for them to unload. Someone asked if something was burning. This was about 8:20 AM and they had been in the hold for about five minutes. Someone, this witness thinks it was BILL THOMPSON, said, "Here it is".

This witness went over and pulled aside several sacks and could see smoke and fire that looked like it was about three or four feet in width. Someone sent down two gallon jugs of water and this witness and others called for a hose. Two fire extinguishers were passed down to them and they were used for awhile. About that time five or six of the ship's crew came down and they were doing a lot of talking and tore open several sacks of fertilizer. This witness states that he did not see any fire hose come into the hold.

Foreman BOSWELL called them out of the hold and when they got on deck someone said they were going to turn the steam on the fire. This witness and others were ordered to cover up the No. 4 Hatch, which they did.

Just before putting the last hatch cover on the French crew came out. Foreman BOSWELL then ordered the men to leave the ship. This witness then helped push three of the four wheel trucks back into the warehouse on the truck. These trucks were already loaded with fertilizer. This was approximately 8:40 AM. This witness then walked with others down the dock ways and then he thought he might as well go as he couldn't do any good and so he went up town.

J. J. RICHARDSON and BILL THOMPSON went with him. They had arrived at Third Street, South, and Texas Avenue, when the explosion occurred. This witness was at his home in Seabrook, Texas, when the High Flyer exploded on the early morning of April 17, 1947.

On March 3, 1957, Mrs. ANNIE BRUNSON, Hitchcock, Texas, was interviewed at her residence where she is self-employed as a real estate operator. Mrs. BRUNSON again related the fact that she was a secretary in the Texas City Police Department at the time of the disaster and received the telephone call requesting police officers be dispatched to that area immediately following that explosion.

The previous interview of Mrs. BRUNSON on March 19, 1948, by Special Agent GEORGE L. KROLL is set forth as follows:

Background of Witness

Mrs. BRUNSON is a white lady and was dispatcher for the Texas City Police Department on April 16, 1947.

Pertinent Period

This witness will testify that the Texas City Police Department has a telephone extension with the Fire Department, which enables the Police Department to intercept all reports to the Fire Department concerning fires. The siren is operated from the Police Department.

She will state that at approximately 8:30 AM, April 16, 1947, some unidentified person telephoned the Fire Department at Texas City reporting the Grand Camp was on fire. Mrs. BRUNSON intercepted the message on the switchboard of the Police Department and reported the same to Chief of Police LADDISH, who instructed her to dispatch Officer J. M. WRIGHT to the dock area. As WRIGHT had previously reported out of service, the Chief directed Mrs. BRUNSON to call Officer W. A. REEVES, who is the school officer, telling him to go to the dock area to direct traffic; Mrs. BRUNSON did this.

The time of the fire report is unknown because the radio records of the Texas City Police Department from April 16, 1947, through April 24, 1947, are missing. Mrs. BRUNSON states that she tried to call the Galveston, Texas Fire Department to request them to contact the Coast Guard to send a fire boat to Texas City. However, the explosion occurred before she could get the call through. There was only one fire report made before the explosion. Later during the night of April 16, 1947, several calls were made to the Police Department regarding the fire on the High Flyer. However, no records are available concerning these.

No official police records were kept from April 16, 1947 to April 29, 1947, because other duties prevented the preparation of these reports.

On March 4, 1957, JAMES J. CORBETTE, Alta Loma, Texas, and JOE C. MENDOZA, Arcadia, Texas, were reinterviewed by Mr. DALE GREEN at their residences.

HO 131-39

On March 5, 1957, BILL LUDLOW and Captain GOODWIN, both employees of G & H Towing Company, Galveston, Texas, were interviewed by Mr. DALE GREEN.

On that same date, Mr. GREEN physically inspected the Texas City disaster area.

On March 6, 1957, Mr. DALE GREEN advised he had conferred with U. S. District Judge BEN C. CONNALLY, Houston, and that pre trial conferences in this matter would probably take place within the next 60 days. He further advised it is his intention to have a motion of discovery filed in this matter.

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HO 131-39

INFORMANTS

T-1, is Bureau source, [REDACTED]

T-2, is [REDACTED] Texas City, Texas

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b7C  
b7D

LEADS

HOUSTON:

AT TEXAS CITY, TEXAS:

1. Will continue efforts to locate WILLIAM K. THOMPSON.
2. Will attempt to locate and interview JAMES FAGG, former longshoreman at time of Texas City disaster, presently believed to be residing at Texas City.
3. Will review U. S. District Clerk's docket, Houston, Texas, and report pertinent matter.

REFERENCE

Report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING, 2/4/57, at Houston.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

REPORTING OFFICE <b>NEW ORLEANS</b>	OFFICE OF ORIGIN <b>HOUSTON</b>	DATE <b>4/9/57</b>	INVESTIGATIVE PERIOD <b>3/25/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS-WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIGHFLYER; SS GRANDCAMP; Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947; Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France; Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		REPORT MADE BY <b>CHARLES R. CARSON</b>	TYPED BY <b>ejf</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

SYNOPSIS:

EARL A. JIMISON deceased. ROSS M. PETERMANN now resides 4653 Kendall Drive, New Orleans, La.

- RUC -

DETAILS:

AT NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA:

Telephonic inquiry of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company verified the fact that EARL A. JIMISON, former Vice President of the Marine Division of Lykes Bros. died over one year ago.

Also by telephonic inquiry on March 25, 1957, Lykes Bros. Steamship Company advised that Captain ROSS M. PETERMANN is now residing at 4653 Kendall Drive, New Orleans, Louisiana.

- RUC -

APPROVED <i>[Signature]</i>	SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACES BELOW	
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		11 APR 12 1957	

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REFERENCE

Bulet to Houston, 3/21/57.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

F B I

Date: 4/30/57

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via AIRTEL AIR MAIL  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Mr. Nease	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

TO: DIRECTOR (131-363)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE;SS HIGHFLYER;SS GRANDCAMP;Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947;Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Companyand Republic of France; Southern Texas,Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870ADMIRALTY MATTERS(OO: Houston)

5-2-57  
01#3 to No  
WBS

The Department by memorandum dated 3/19/57 requested the following investigation:

"Please ascertain the name, present employment and address of the person in charge of the tug PROPELLER which accompanied the tug ALBATROSS to Texas City in the early morning of April 16, 1947. The PROPELLER was dispatched by the G.&H. Towing Company. A complete statement should be secured from this individual detailing all of his activities and observations on that day which relate to the Texas City explosion. His statement should include a description of the conditions at Texas City as he observed them immediately after the explosion. His statement should include a description of the explosion and throughout the day; the names of all persons with whom he discussed the explosion during the day and particularly whether any of these persons were employed by the Lykes Bros. Steamship Company; a summary of the matters discussed in these conversations insofar as they relate to the Texas City explosion or the removal of Lykes Bros. vessels; and whether

3 - Bureau (AM)

2 - New Orleans (131-65) (AM)

1 - Houston

JJD:bjc  
(6)

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Mr. Rosen

10 MAY 1 1957

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Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_

F B I

Date:

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via \_\_\_\_\_  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

in his opinion the HIGHFLYER could have been moved immediately after the explosion or during that day detailing the basis for that opinion if he has one.

"With regard to all of those persons which are interviewed, we would appreciate any pertinent facts bearing upon their recollection of past events, credibility, general appearance and any other comments on their prospects as a potential witness."

Investigation Houston Division reflects FREDERICK G. LOTZ was in charge of tug PROPELLER at the time in question.

On 4/29/57 BOB GANT, B&M Towing Company, Houston, advised Captain F. GEORGE LOTZ is the Captain on the MARY B, a motor vessel working on the Mississippi River. This vessel is scheduled to arrive at Baton Rouge, La., on Friday, 5/3/57, at noon where it can be reached c/o Industrial Molasses Company. The vessel will remain there for approximately 24 hours. The next scheduled stop of this vessel is on Sunday, 5/5/57, where it will remain for approximately 18 hours c/o Southwestern Sugar and Molasses Company, Gretna, La.

NEW ORLEANS will locate and interview LOTZ as requested. It should be noted there is no record Houston indices of this man and he apparently was not interviewed during the original Texas City Disaster investigation.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>NEW ORLEANS</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>5/7/57</b>	Investigative Period <b>5/3/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE  <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Bros. Steamship Company and Republic of France</b>		Report made by <b>JULIAN A. MARTIN</b>	Typed By: <b>PGB</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE  <b>ADMIRALTY MATTER</b>	

Synopsis:  
**Southern Texas,  
Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870**

FREDERICK GEORGE LOTZ, Houston, Texas, in signed statement furnished at Baton Rouge, La., 5/3/57 stated was officer in charge of tug Propeller at time of first Texas City, Texas explosion; that his company ordered his tug to proceed from Galveston, Texas to Texas City on morning of explosion to pull a burning ship away from docks; that explosion occurred when his tug about six miles away; that thereafter he proceeded to a nearby island and picked injured crewmen from other tugs; that he returned to Galveston about 1PM same date; that he could not see what was happening at Texas City Docks and knew nothing about the SS Highflyer; that he talked to no one from Lykes Brothers Steamship Company.

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Approved <i>RJA</i>	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
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*CC Hq  
Data sect, encl  
5/10/57  
JBS*

*WSS  
EX-134  
STAT SECT.*

NO 131-65

DETAILS:

AT BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Mr. FREDERICK GEORGE LOTZ was located aboard the tug Mary B on May 3, 1957. He stated he did not recall the date of the explosion of the Grandcamp in Texas City, Texas, however; it was about ten years ago. He also stated he could not remember the names of other crew members of the tug Propeller.

He furnished the following signed statement which is being transmitted to the Houston office with copies of this report:

"Baton Rouge, La.

"May 3, 1957

"I, Frederick George Lotz, make the following voluntary statement to J. A. Martin and George C. Horner, Special Agents, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"I presently live at 11001 Debra Street, Houston, Texas, and am employed by the B & M Towing Company as Captain of the Mary B.

"In 1947 I was employed by the G & H Towing Company and was First Mate on the tug Propeller which worked the Galveston, Texas area. Leonard Hard was Captain of the Propeller. I understand he still works for the same company. He was off duty the morning of the Texas City explosion and I was in charge of the Propeller. About 8 AM on that day my we were docking a ship at the western pier in Galveston. The Albatross was on the same job. At about that time I received a radio message from company headquarters through another tug in the area, to proceed to Texas City and pull a burning ship from the dock. As soon as we finished docking the ship, which took about 20 minutes the Propeller and the Albatross proceeded to Texas City. The Albatross was ahead of us. At about the time we entered the Texas City channel and when about 6 or 7 miles from the Texas City docks I felt a jar or shock and shortly afterwards saw a large smoke at the Texas City docks.

NO 131-65

"One of the deck hands on the Propeller was Bob Boyard who still lives in the Houston area and works for a small towing company out of Galveston.

"We nosed the Propeller into the north end of the island on the left of the channel. Several crew members, off the tug boats who had been injured by the explosion, were on this island. I sent a life boat ashore on the island and picked up about 12 to 15 injured persons and took them aboard the Propeller and a short time later the U. S. Engineer yacht came alongside and the injured people were transferred to it.

"We stayed around the area of the island on instructions from our office in Galveston until about noon of that day at which time I received instructions to return to Pier 10 in Galveston, which we did arriving there about 1 P.M. and I went off duty and went home in Houston and have no personal knowledge of later events at Texas City.

"While at Texas City on the day of the explosion it was so much smoke at the docks I could not tell what ships were there. No one told me anything about the Highflyer being there and I couldn't see anything at the docks or in Texas City.

"I don't recall the names of anyone I discussed the explosion with except Boyard. I don't recall having any conversation about the explosion with anyone from Lykes Brothers Steamship Company. The conversation I had concerning the fact a ship had exploded and we wondered how many people had been killed.

"I am not in a position to express any opinion whether the Highflyer could have been moved because I knew nothing about. The only discussion I had with my company officials on the morning of the explosion was an inquiry they made whether we could get on into the harbor and I told them we could not due to a west wind blowing the smoke across the harbor.

"I have read the above statment an it corect.

"F. G. Lotz



NO 131-65

"Witnessed:

"J. A. Martin, Sp. Agt., FBI, New Orleans, La.

"George C. Horner, Sp. Agt., F.B.I., New Orleans, La."

ENCL: TO HOUSTON: Signed statement of FREDERICK GEORGE LOTZ.

- RUC -

NO 131-65

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

It is being left to descretion of Houston office whether BOB BOYARD is interviewed. It should be noted Mr. LOTZ was not sure of the spelling of this name.

REFERENCE

Houston airtel to Bureau dated 4/30/57.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : SAC, *New Orleans* (Your file *131-65* DATE: *5-2-57*)FROM : Director, FBI (Bufile and serial *131-363*)SUBJECT: *S.S. Wilson B. Keene etc* Office of Origin: *Ido*  
*Admiralty matters*

1. ( ) The deadline in this case has passed and the Bureau has not received a report. You are instructed to submit a report immediately. In the event a report has been submitted, you should make a notation of the date on which it was submitted on this letter and return it to the Bureau, Room No. *Room 4714*

Report submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Report will be submitted *by 5/10/57* \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for delay \_\_\_\_\_

2. ( ) Advise Bureau re status of this case.
3. ☒ Advise Bureau when report may be expected.
4. ( ) Surep immediately.

(Place your reply on this form and return to the Bureau. Note on the top serial in the case file the receipt and acknowledgment of this communication.)

SEARCHED.....	INDEXED.....
SERIALIZED.....	FILED.....
MAY 3 1957	
FBI - NEW ORLEANS	

*Bureau*

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>HOUSTON</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>MAY 14 1957</b>	Investigative Period <b>3/13,25; 4/8,10,25,29; 5/1/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS. WILSON B. KEENE SS- HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Republic of France</b>		Report made by <b>JOSEPH J. DOOLING (A)</b>	Typed By: <b>ys</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Synopsis: Southern, Texas,  
Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870.

ANGELO J. AMATO, who was in charge of Tug Albatross at G and H Towing Company on date of Texas City explosion located and interview set forth. JAMES R. FAGG, Walking Foreman in charge of loading the GRANDCAMP at time of explosion, located and interviewed. Efforts to locate WILLIAM K. THOMPSON, unproductive. JOE CASH, former AUSA, Houston, who handled original Texas City trial, cannot recall individual who supposedly heard that two explosions when the GRANDCAMP exploded.

## DETAILS:

The Department by memorandum dated March 19, 1957, requested additional investigation in this matter. The investigation requested at Houston Division is set forth:

Approved <i>[Signature]</i>	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made:  2 - Bureau (131-363) 1 - USA, Houston 2 - New Orleans 2 - Houston (131-39)		1-1-365-40	
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HO 131-39

1. The current address and present employment of the following individuals formerly employed by Lykes Brothers Steamship Company on April 16, 1947, was requested.

- a. JOHN H. WALTERS, Chief Engineer  
Last known address,  
7610 Joplin Street  
Houston, Texas

On March 25, 1957, it was ascertained that this individual has not been listed in the Houston Telephone or City Directories or Kriss Kross Directories in recent years. Investigation on that same day did not reveal the present occupant of that address.

- b. JAMES V. BARRETT, First Mate  
Port Arthur, Texas

On April 8, 1957, J. ROY FAULKNER, Manager, Retail Merchants Association, Port Arthur, Texas, was interviewed by Special Agent WILLIAM J. SCHMIDT. Mr. FAULKNER stated that his records reflect that an inquiry was received by that association from the Credit Bureau of Greater Houston in 1954 and reflected that JAMES V. BARRETT was residing at 1202 Harrison Street, Pasadena, Texas.

On April 29, 1957, Assistant Chief of Police J. GAINES, Pasadena, Texas, advised Special Agent WILLIAM H. DE GAN that the City Directory, Telephone Directory, and official map of Pasadena do not include the name of BARRETT nor Harrison Street. He further stated that he is not familiar with such a street in Pasadena. The City Directory for Pasadena did reflect, however, a JAMES A. BARRETT, occupation pipe fitter, and JAMES D. BARRETT, no occupation, residing at 725 Robinson, Pasadena, Texas. Chief GAINES stated that he is very familiar with that address and that it is a "run down" section of the city.

2. The departmental memorandum further requested that the following individuals be located and their full names, present addresses and employments be ascertained: These individuals were employed by Lykes Brothers on April 16, 1947,

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and from the testimony of J. G. TOMPKINS, Vice President in charge of the Galveston Lykes Brothers Steamship Company before the Coast Guard Board of Investigation April 17, 1947, Galveston, mentioned these names in his testimony. According to Mr. TOMPKINS' testimony, Captains HENDRIX and JOHNSON were dispatched by car from Galveston, Texas, to Texas City about 9:00 AM on April 16, 1947. Mr. SWEENEY and Mr. KRIS were dispatched by boat from Galveston to Texas City shortly afternoon on April 16, 1947, to ascertain the condition of the HIGHFLYER and the WILSON B. KEENE. These individuals are listed below.

Captain ROBERT TOWNSEND  
Port Captain in Marine Department  
Galveston, Texas

Captain HENDRIX (FNU)  
Port Captain in Marine Department  
Galveston, Texas

Captain JOHNSON (FNU)  
Manager of Marine Department  
Galveston, Texas

L. M. SMITH, a port engineer assigned  
to looking after repairs on HIGHFLYER  
Galveston, Texas

ED HARPER, a port engineer  
Galveston, Texas

Mr. SWEENEY (FNU)  
Manager of Claims and Insurance Division  
Galveston, Texas

W. C. KRIS, position unknown  
Galveston, Texas

Mr. GROTEMAT (FNU)  
Position unknown  
Galveston, Texas

HO 131-39

3. This departmental memorandum further requested the current address and present position of ANGELO J. AMATO be ascertained. This individual was an employee of the G & H Towing Company on April 16, 1947, and was in charge of the Tug PROPELLER. It was also requested that he be interviewed.

On April 25, 1957, ANGELO JOSEPH AMATO was interviewed at his residence, 1205 Bay Street North, Texas City, Texas, by Special Agents JOSEPH J. DOOLING and HOLLIS Q. BOONE. He advised he was self-employed and is secretary and treasurer of the Texas City Boatmens Association. He further advised that this association consists of three individuals who have standing contracts with the various seagoing vessels which dock in Texas City. This contract gives the Boatmens Association the exclusive right to secure or tie up the vessel when it comes along side the dock and also to remove such lines when the vessel leaves the dock. AMATO explained that because of this contract he remains at his home constantly awaiting calls from various vessels.

The previously reported interview of AMATO was reviewed by him as previously reported when he was interviewed by Special Agents MAURICE H. PRICE and MURRY C. FALKNER on March 9, 1948, at Galveston. The previous interview together with pertinent excerpts of the log from the Tug ALBATROSS are set out below:

#### Background of Witness

This witness is Captain of the tug boat Albatross, which is owned and operated by the G. & H Towing Company, Galveston, Texas. He holds a master's license and has the responsibility of towing and directing large vessels. He appears to be alert and intelligent.

#### Pertinent Period

At 8:40 AM on April 16, 1947, the tug boat Albatross, of which the witness was Captain, and the tug boat Propeller, both owned by the G & H Towing Company, were moving the SS Wagon Mound to the docks at the Texas Coast Yard. Witness heard a radio telephone message on the air that there was a

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ship on fire at Texas City. He then received orders from Mr. LUDLOW of the G & H Towing Company for the tugs Albatross and Propeller to go to Texas City.

At 8:50 AM they finished docking the SS Wagon Mound and left en route to Texas City. At 9:13 AM while the Albatross was opposite No. 3 Texas City Can Buoy, which is not quite half way to Texas City, the Grand Camp blew up. Both tugs continued on to Texas City and witness called his office by radio notifying them what had happened. He was instructed to render all assistance possible but not to get in a jam. When he reached Texas City it was impossible to go into the harbor because of the fire, smoke and intense heat. He ran the Albatross aground on a small island opposite the harbor and launched his life boat. The tug Propeller also launched its boat and assisted the witness.

Witness picked up ten survivors from the water and from the island. These men were from the tugs Pan-American No. 1 and Rector. They then returned to Galveston with the men, notifying the authorities to have ambulances at the dock. They reached Pier 20 at Galveston at 11:15 AM.

There were no further instructions to go to Texas City until that evening. In the evening, however, at about 9:00 PM, Captain FARR, Mr. JAMIESON and Mr. TOMPKINS of the Lykes Steamship Company, were at the office on Pier 10. The Lykes Company ordered the tugs to go to Texas City to move the High Flyer which had ammonium nitrate on board. The boat was on fire and there had been talk that it might explode.

Sufficient crews volunteered and at 10:30 AM the tugs Guyton, Albatross, Charles Clark and Miraflores left the Galveston Pier for Texas City. Witness was in charge of the Albatross. On board his ship were men from Geys Iron Works with equipment to cut the anchor chain of the High Flyer. They had been hired by Lykes. The officials from the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Captain GOODWIN were on the Guyton.

They reached the High Flyer at 11:20 PM. The Guyton put Captain GOODWIN, Captain FARR and Mr. JAMIESON on board the High Flyer and then an attempt was made to



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move the High Flyer out but without success. The Albatross then assisted the Guyton but the two of them could not move the High Flyer.

Finally the Guyton took the men off the High Flyer and they were ordered by Captain GOODWIN to return to Galveston. Witness had just taken the Albatross around the bend of the Texas City Channel when the High Flyer blew up. He then turned around and went back to assist the Guyton. He took some of the men off of that tug and then proceeded to Galveston, notifying them by radio to have ambulances ready. The Albatross reached Pier 10 in Galveston at 2:00 AM on April 17, 1947.

The following are pertinent excerpts taken from the log of the Albatross.

April 16, 1947

7:40 AM Alongside SS Wagon Mound to dock at Texas Coast Yard. Tugs Messenger and Propeller were assisting. Pilot of Wagon Mound, P. WATSON.

8:50 AM Finish same. Left for Texas City to assist SS Grand Camp reported to be on fire. About 9:13 ship exploded. Proceeded to Texas City, rendered all assistance.

10:40 AM Left Texas City for Pier 20. Available pickup ten survivors, delivered same to Pier 20.

11:15 AM Pier 20.

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10:30 PM Left Galveston to Texas City to assist SS High Flyer.

11:20 PM Alongside assist SS High Flyer dead shifting off El. Ship was burning in one cargo hold. J. G. Guyton, Clark, Miraflores, P. J. Goodwin.

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1:10 AM Captain GOODWIN gave order to leave ship and left for Pier 10.

2:00 AM At Pier 10.

AMATO stated that he would like to make two additions or corrections to this previously reported interview. The first such correction concerns the fact that when at approximately 9:00 PM on April 16, 1947, Captain WEATHERBEE of the G & H Towing Company, Captain FARR, Mr. JAMIESON, and Mr. TOMPKINS of the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company were in the office at Pier 10 someone had made the statement that the cargo of the HIGHFLYER consisted of sulphur and cotton. AMATO stated that when he took his tug out on that same evening he learned that the HIGHFLYER contained ammonium nitrate.

AMATO further stated that he would like to correct another statement concerning the name Geys Iron Works. AMATO stated that this should be Grays Iron Works. AMATO stated that he had for years been under the impression that this company's name was Geys and had supplied that name to the agents when formerly interviewed. AMATO advised that in recent years he has discovered the true name of this company to be Grays.

AMATO stated that on the night in question he felt that the Tug PROPELLER was in command by an individual whose name was GEORGE LUX. AMATO stated, however, he could not be sure of this spelling but that the individual lived in Houston, Texas, and now works on a vessel operating on the Mississippi River.

AMATO stated that in his opinion the HIGHFLYER could have been taken out into the ship channel during the day following the first explosion had any requests been made to do so at that time. AMATO further advised that during the morning following the original explosion the fire was consuming the entire area. The water itself was on fire from the floating oil and the smoke was so dense that it would have been impossible to remove the HIGHFLYER; however, in the afternoon the fire died down and, in AMATO's

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opinion, the vessel could have been removed at that time. In AMATO's opinion, the reason the HIGHFLYER could not have been removed in the night when an attempt was made to do so was because of the fact that there was a fire on the HIGHFLYER making it so hot it was hard to work on the vessel. Also, the cargo booms of the HIGHFLYER and KEENE had become so fouled up at night it was impossible to disengage them. AMATO stated that in his opinion that these two conditions which prevented moving the vessel at night did not exist or were not as complicated in the afternoon following the original explosion. He believes because of this reason the vessel could have been removed on the afternoon of April 16, 1947.

AMATO stated that during the day of April 16, 1947, he did not talk to any individual whose name he can recall concerning the condition at the scene of the original explosion. AMATO did talk to Captain GOODWIN of his company and told him that the situation was very bad. He stated that he probably talked to various individuals, not officially but in normal conversation, concerning the explosion and that everyone else in the Texas City area did the same thing.

AMATO stated that he never saw or talked about the explosion to anyone known to him to be employees or officers of Lykes Brothers on April 16, 1947, prior to the meeting that evening at 9:00 AM on Pier 10. AMATO stated that following his return from the trip to Texas City after the first explosion he brought back survivors to Pier 20. When he brought these survivors there were some men at the pier at that time. AMATO states he does not recall who the men were or what was said regarding the Texas City explosion.

AMATO stated that on the morning trip following the first explosion everything for about a block and one-half from the Red Beacon in the ship channel near the explosion was on fire. He ran his vessel aground deliberately to pick up survivors from the explosion and because some of these survivors were still very far away he launched his life boat. AMATO stated that in his opinion that as a seaman he could not have gone into the immediate scene of the explosion

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at that time because it was all on fire including the water, and he was operating a diesel tug at the time of his subsequent trip to the scene of the explosion.

AMATO described this subsequent trip, which was the one made on the evening of April 16, 1947. He stated as previously related he pulled his tug up to the HIGHFLYER and with cutting torches the men cut away the bow anchor chain. AMATO stated that it was definitely a fire in the number 1 hole of that vessel when they were cutting the chain. He said the sound of this fire could be heard and it reminded him of a volcano because of the roar it made while they were there. AMATO stated that he definitely recalls some Lykes Brothers officials telling him that evening that there was positively no danger of an explosion, and it is AMATO's recollection that there was sulphur and cotton aboard at that time. AMATO stated that it was when his vessel was along side the HIGHFLYER that he found out from someone whose name he cannot recall, that there was ammonium nitrate aboard. AMATO further stated that he only made two trips to the scene of the Texas City disaster, which trips had previously been described.

ANGELO JOSEPH AMATO is approximately 6 feet tall, very muscular in build and gives the appearance of being a very huge man. His recollection of the events during the explosion appear to be good. AMATO has been associated with shipping during his adult life. He is very creditable. He gives the appearance of a straight honest man and appears to be very cooperative. He lives in a better than average middle class home and appears to be an industrious hard-working individual. He would be considered a very good witness in this matter.

The Department memorandum dated March 19, 1957, also requested that the identity of the man in charge of the Tug PROPELLER be ascertained together with his present employment and address. It is further requested that this individual be interviewed.

On April 10, 1957, WILLIAM LUDLEY, G & H Towing Company, Galveston, Texas, advised that Captain LEONARD

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HARD, who resides in La Porte, Texas, was the captain of the Tug PROPELLER on the day in question.

On March 25, 1957, Captain LEONARD HARD was located at his residence at 115 North Yupon Street, La Porte, Texas. HARD stated that he came on duty on April 16, 1947, after the Tug PROPELLER had returned from the first trip to the disaster area. Further, that shortly afternoon on that same date he returned to Houston, Texas. He stated that his mate, whose name he could not recall, was in charge of the vessel. He believed this mate's name to be GEORGE and that possibly the last name was LUTZ. He stated that this mate has since left the G & H Towing Company and now operates a river boat on the Mississippi.

On April 25, 1957, WILLIAM LUDLOW, G & H Towing Company, Galveston, Texas, advised his records reflect that the company employed a FREDERICK G. LOTZ, Q36 Boyles, Houston, Texas, Social Security No. [REDACTED] Inquiry at the Coast Guard, Galveston, by Mr. LUDLOW on the same date reflected this individual is a resident at 631 Zoe Street, Houston, Texas, at the present time.

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On April 29, 1957, MAMIE WAGENKFECHT, 631 Zoe Street, Houston, Texas, advised her brother is FRED G. LOTZ; that he is employed by the B & M Towing Company, 4511 Harrisburg, Houston; that he has recently gone to St. Louis and is not expected to return for two months. During those two months he will be operating a vessel on the Mississippi River.

On April 29, 1957, BOB GANT, B & M Towing Company, 4511 Harrisburg, Houston, stated that F. G. LOTZ is the captain in charge of the motor vessel MARY B. Further, that LOTZ will be working on the Mississippi River for the next forty days. The vessel is scheduled to arrive in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for 24 hours on Friday, May 3, 1957, and can be reached in care of the Industrial Molasses Company. The next scheduled stop of this vessel is on Sunday, May 6, 1957, where it will remain there approximately 18 hours, in care of Southwestern Sugar and Molasses Company, Gretna, Louisiana.

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The Department memorandum dated March 17, 1957, further requested that JAMES R. FAGG be located and interviewed to verify statement which he previously gave on March 8, 1948.

On April 25, 1957, Mr. JAMES R. FAGG, 914 19th Avenue North, Texas City, was interviewed by Special Agents DOOLING and BOONE at his residence. He advised that he is employed as a dragline operator by the county of Galveston. The office in which he works is located in Kemah, Texas, and that he spends the majority of his time during the day working on roads in Galveston County. At the outset of this interview, FAGG pointed out in detail that it was because of the Texas City explosion that he had become a county employee. After the explosion he was unable to pass any physical examination and therefore had to change his occupation from a stevedore foreman to a dragline operator. FAGG in great detail explained the fact that his ears run constantly as a result of injuries suffered in the Texas City explosion, and both he and his wife stated the fact that they only received \$5,000 from the Federal Government. FAGG and his wife also pointed out that they knew of other individuals who were not near the scene of the explosion but who were injured as a result of the explosion who received more money than they did. Throughout the interview FAGG explained that he was a chemist and knew the reason for the Texas City explosion. The following is the interview of JAMES R. FAGG as recorded in the original Texas City investigation when he was interviewed by Special Agents LEO K. COOK and ROY T. NOONAN on March 8, 1947, at Texas City, Texas:

#### Background of Witness

FAGG is a white man thirty-seven years of age, married, and has two children. He is more or less of the belligerent type of individual and made the statement that he wanted to be told why he had not been notified of the danger in handling this FGAN. He apparently has done a lot of reading along scientific lines, perhaps while he was in the hospital as a result of injuries, and his statements are colored by what he has since learned. He would make statements

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that were obviously not within his knowledge and was very indefinite and hard to pin down. He thinks the Government is negligent because no one told him FGAN was explosive, and because he had never had any instructions as to how to load it or how to fight fire with it aboard ship--that he assumed steam was the best method and that he had never been told differently.

As an example, FAGG stated that when BOSWELL's crew removed the first boat from Hatch No. 4 they saw smoke there and told him there was a fire. He later admitted that he was not on deck, and did not know whether this was so. He later said that he looked in the hold and there was a small wisp of smoke, and that before the hatch was closed the fire suddenly spread over the entire hold as if gasoline had been poured in it. He repeated this several times, and then when it was pointed out that several members of the French crew came out alive just before the last board was placed on the hatch cover he changed this and stated what he meant was that the wisp of smoke spread all along the in-shore side of the ship in No. 4 Hold had changed color but that he had not seen any flames.

FAGG feels that he is quite qualified from a scientific standpoint from what he has read about ammonium nitrate since the explosion, and also because he worked in the Atomic Energy Plant at Hanford, Washington, at one time.

As another indication of FAGG's unreliability and lack of veracity, this witness advised that non-union men who worked as longshoremen could, if they so desired, make a contribution to the longshoremen's local but were not compelled to pay any dues or any fee to the local. As a matter of fact, many of the longshoremen who have been interviewed in this case, who were non-union men, stated they were always required to pay a fee to the union when they worked.

#### General Experience

This witness has been a longshoreman for twenty years and during that time he has had considerable experience



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in the handling of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. He states that he did not know that ammonium nitrate fertilizer was dangerous and that no one ever gave him any instructions on how to handle this fertilizer.

Safety Regulations:

This witness can testify that ammonium nitrate fertilizer was contained in paper bags. He states that bags of fertilizer are broken in handling, and if such bags are broken in the warehouses they are set aside to be rebagged, but the bags that were not badly broken such as those as might have only a small hole or tear were loaded; that if bags broke in the holds of ships it was left up to the judgment of the walking foreman as to what to do. He states that frequently in the holds of boats loading ammonium nitrate fertilizer there is much loose fertilizer from broken sacks. He says that they never load any other material in the same hold with ammonium nitrate fertilizer.

In loading ammonium nitrate fertilizer in the holds of boats the bags are thrown in relays in order to get them back to the ends of the hold. Some of the bags, therefore, are broken; between the fifth and sixth layer of these bags there is an asphalt cover to help resist the acid, but that he has seen black spots on the bags on the outside. Usually such bags would be weak and would break when picked up.

This witness states that he has observed workers trying to burn this fertilizer and it would not burn. He has observed workers taking a handful of it and putting cigarettes in the fertilizer in order to put the cigarettes out, the same as using sand. He claims, however, this was done off the boats.

This witness will state that sometimes the captain of a ship would give order not to smoke; that there were "No Smoking" signs in the warehouses and on the docks, and that this rule is enforced. On all American ships there is a watchman but very seldom do foreign ships have watchmen. There is usually a sack sewer on ships and also a signal man.



It is up to the Agent of the ship whether there is to be a sack sewer or signal man. The failure to have a signal man restricts the close supervision of the men under the gang foreman for the gang foreman has to act as signal man.

This witness states that the longshoremen's local No. 636 at Texas City, Texas, had rules governing smoking which were set forth in the constitution and by-laws and that these rules prohibited smoking in the hold of any ship; that there was a penalty for the violation of these rules amounting to a fine for each of the first two offenses and expulsion from the union for the third offense. Further, that such a violation was handled by the grievance committee of the union. This witness states that each member of the union was given a copy of the booklet containing the constitution and by-laws and, therefore, was advised of this "No Smoking" regulation, as well as other safety regulations which he states were contained therein. As to the non-union men, this witness says that the walking foremen advised the gang foreman on each ship that there was to be no smoking, and that the gang foreman in turn told the men. This witness says that he always told the gang foreman under him; that he had so told LEONARD D. BOSWELL and JESSE NEWLIN, gang foremen under him, that there was to be no smoking, and that he presumed his order had in turn been relayed to the men by these gang foremen.

This witness states that the Texas Marine Safety Councils Safety Rules Governing Stevedoring was not furnished every union member, but that the local union had had these pamphlets and had made them available to the men so long as they lasted. They did not always have these pamphlets on hand. He says that approximately 50 per cent of the men working on the Grand Camp belonged to Local 636 of the Longshoremen's Union, 25 per cent belonged to Local 1405 of the Ila Warehousemen's union, while the remaining 25 per cent were non-union men.

This witness will state that he cannot recall any longshoreman ever having been disciplined either by fine or expulsion from the union for violating the smoking regulations which he claimed existed.

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As a matter of fact an examination of a copy of the constitution and by-laws of Local 636, Ila at Texas City, reflects that there are no regulations regarding smoking contained therein. It does contain regulations relative to the prevention of accidents and prohibits drinking on the job or intoxication and fighting, as well as bringing liquor on the job, but does not mention smoking in any place.

In further impeaching of FAGG's testimony, JACQUE GIRARDIN, Financial Secretary of Local 636, Ila, Texas City, has stated that there is no union regulation against smoking, and that the constitution and by-laws of the local union does not contain any such regulation; that there is a general rule against longshoremen smoking on any vessel but this rule was made by either the owners of the ships or the stevedoring companies, and that the union had always advocated that this rule be followed.

GIRARDIN further advised when shown a pamphlet of safety rules governing stevedoring put out by the Texas Marine Safety Councils, that he had never seen one of the pamphlets before, although he had been a longshoreman in Texas City for forty years, and that the local union had never had copies of these pamphlets and had never made such pamphlets available to any of its members.

#### Pertinent Period

This witness was selected by the Suderman Stevedoring Company as walking foreman on the Grand Camp when it arrived in port on April 11, 1947. He says he received no written or verbal orders from anyone as to how to load the Grand Camp. No one gave him any orders or instructions as to smoking on the Grand Camp, but he understood the general no smoking rule applied. This foreman states that he told each foreman, L. D. BOSWELL and JESS NEWLIN, that there was to be no smoking on the Grand Camp except in the companionway or designated areas. He says he told this to these foremen right at the hatch aboard the Grand Camp at the outset before the loading started. This witness says that he never saw this order violated by any of the men and never saw any smoking aboard the Grand Camp

[REDACTED] in the companionway. He says he never saw any smoking [REDACTED] in the warehouse; that sometimes the Captain of a [REDACTED] could give orders not to smoke, but that no such orders were received from the Captain on the Grand Camp. There was a sign on this ship on the deck house in English which said "No Smoking". There was a sign just above this in French, which this witness thought meant the same. This witness states that there was no watchman on the Grand Camp and no sack sewer or signal man.

This witness states that the order from Suderman was that any broken bags in the warehouse were to be set aside, and that he understood this to mean that this applied only to bags that were broken so that the fertilizer would run out, but that these bags not badly broken, which might have only a small hole or tear, were to be loaded. This witness states he passed this order out to the gang foremen. This witness says that it was left to his judgment what to do with bags broken while being loaded in the hold, and that his instructions were that if such broken bags were still on the trays in the holds that they would be brought out, but after they were taken off the tray none of the broken bags were to be brought back. This witness states that there was loose fertilizer in the hold of the Grand Camp about one inch thick; that he has seen much more loose fertilizer in other ships. He says that about one bag out of twenty had some kind of a break in it; that the bags on this ship were better than the usual run; that the breakage was a little below the average of the breakage on other ships. This witness states that he had occasion to feel several bags during the course of the loading and that the fertilizer was generally a little warmer in the cargo being placed on the Grand Camp than was usual. The color of the fertilizer and its general appearance was the same as on other boats he had loaded. The fertilizer could be handled without gloves.

He states that the loading of the fertilizer was done in exactly the usual manner as he had handled it on other ships. He also says that in the warehouse where this ammonium nitrate fertilizer was being obtained and placed on the Grand Camp, there was flour in the east end of the

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warehouse which had fallen right up against the ammonium nitrate fertilizer. There were also some empty five-gallon drums in the warehouse.

The following is being quoted from the statement given by this witness, which he refused to sign:

"On the morning of April 16, 1947, I got to the docks about 6:40 AM. JESSE NEWLIN and his gang got there about 7:00 AM. The No. 2 Hatch had not been covered as I had requested that it be left open if the weather was good. I went up with NEWLIN about five minutes to 7:00 and I checked this hatch and his men started to work. Then I went to the warehouse and checked with Mr. WELLS, the checker, and showed the men where to start the loading. Then I went with the checker to look over what was to go in Hatch No. 4. It was then about 7:50 AM and I went out to BOSWELL and his crew and said, "Let's go". The hatch cover on No. 4 was down as it had been placed at 5:00 PM on the day before and at which time I had inspected it and there was no fire. The men in BOSWELL's crew went aboard and nine of them went with me into the warehouse where I showed them what they were to load. At that time SUDERMAN was with him. We were in there about five minutes as it seemed to me, when BOSWELL yelled that there was a fire on board. I ran aboard with SUDERMAN following and looked in No. 4 Hatch and there was only a thin curl of black smoke coming up. The Captain of the ship was also there and the crew of the ship were just getting the hose down. Some of the longshoremen were in the hatch but I did not see any of the crew in there at that time. The Captain said something in French and the men with the hose stopped. He then said in English, "NO, NO, NO, no water, it will ruin the cargo. Use the steam". PETE SUDERMAN repeated this order by saying not to put water on and to put the hatch cover on and put the steam on. I repeated this order to the men, ordered them out of the hatch, and we closed it and just before it was completely closed I went over to No. 2 Hatch and ordered it covered. When I came back the Captain said there was ammunition aboard in No. 5 Hatch. I told some of the men to come and help get it out and some of them did. Some of the men went down in the hatch and got several boxes out. There were

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some boxes that we could not pull up or move but whether or not that was ammunition I could not say. When we got this done the fire was raging and I told the men they better get off. When on the dock the pressure blew off the hatch covers and they were scattered all over the dock. I went to the Terminal Office and reported and said they better cover the High Flyer and then I went over to the High Flyer and told CHESTER HOFF who was walking this ship that the fire was out of control and that he better cover up.

I went to the power house and asked about the pressure on the pumps and then came back to see SUDERMAN about whether all the men were off the ship. I was near the ship, the GrandCamp, just behind it on the dock when it blew up."

This interview was reviewed with FAGG, and he stated it was correct.

FAGG stated that this interview set forth all details which he could recall concerning the method of loading and the extent to which the vessel was supervised, the details of loading and the methods used in fighting the fire and the regulations as to smoking and the violations thereof. FAGG further pointed out that this interview covers his previous experience and knowledge of ammonium nitrate.

FAGG stated that he does not smoke himself and that he does not recall if members of the crew of the GRANDCAMP smoked in the loading area.

FAGG emphatically stated that there was bound to be something wrong with the batch of fertilizer which the Government had produced, as it caused explosions in three vessels to FAGG's knowledge; however, he never heard of other vessels with ammonium nitrate which had exploded. FAGG stated that from his experience as a chemist, fire could have been caused by a chemical reaction or by spontaneous combustion or by other means and was not necessarily caused by smoke. In this regard, FAGG stated

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he did not believe the fire started from smoking. His opinion, however, was not supported by any statements from him other than the fact he was a chemist and he knew about such things.

Throughout the interview with FAGG, he never looked the interviewing agents in the eye or directed his fact in their direction. He did state that he was a "chemist" and that he did not get enough money from the Government because of his injuries and that some young second lieutenant had decided that he should get \$5,000 while he knew of other people who got more money. FAGG would be considered a very poor witness for the Government in this matter by the reporting agent; namely, because of the fact that he injected his personal opinions in with the facts concerning the Texas City explosion.

On April 25, 1957, T-1, who has furnished reliable information in the past, advised no drivers license has been issued for [redacted] since 1952 and that the last record concerning this individual was that his license was under suspension for DWI since June 12, 1953.

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On April 25, 1957, LEON HENRY, president of the ILA Local No. 636, Texas City, advised he does not know a WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON. Subsequently, on April 25, 1957, LEON HENRY stated that he understood that LEONARD BOSWELL, who operates the Port Arthur Local Union, may know WILLIAM K. THOMPSON as he, HENRY, believes they are both from the same home town.

On April 25, 1957, WILLIAM C. THOMPSON, 1211 Third Avenue, Texas City, advised that he was a longshoremen at the time of the Texas City explosion. THOMPSON stated that WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON is no kin to him and that he does not know his present whereabouts.

On May 1, 1957, JOE CASH, Attorney, San Jacinto Building, Houston, Texas, was interviewed. Mr. CASH was the Assistant U. S. Attorney who handled the trial of the original Texas City explosion in Houston. Mr. CASH stated

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that he could not recall the name of the individual whom he had interviewed himself and who stated that two explosions occurred on the morning of April 16, 1947. Mr. CASH stated that at his earliest opportunity he would review his various documents and files concerning this case and he felt sure he could locate the name of this individual.

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INFORMANT

T-1 is H. C. SMITH, Captain, Custodian of Records, Texas Public Safety, Austin, Texas.

LEADS

NEW ORLEANS:

AT BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA:

Will locate and interview FREDERICK G. LOTZ, Captain of the MARY B. This lead previously set forth in airtel dated 4/30/57.

HOUSTON:

AT GALVESTON, TEXAS:

Will ascertain the present address and employment of the former employees of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company as requested by the Department, whose names are set forth in the details of this report.

AT PORT ARTHUR, TEXAS:

Will interview LEONARD D. BOSWELL, 202 Fifth Street, who is a longshoremen working out of Local 1029, IILA, 424 San Antonio Street, Port Arthur, as to his knowledge concerning whereabouts of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON, longshoremen, who worked on the GRANDCAMP at the time of the explosion.

AT HOUSTON, TEXAS:

1. Will continue efforts to locate WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON.
2. Will reinterview JOE CASH, San Jacinto Building, concerning information pertinent to this case.
3. Will review U. S. District Clerk's Docket, Houston, Texas, and report pertinent developments.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE



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4. Will continue efforts to locate JOHN H. WALTERS, former chief engineer, the SS HIGHFLYER, whose last known address was 7610 Joplin Street, Houston, Texas.

5. Will conduct investigation to ascertain the present address and employment of JAMES B. BARRETT, whose last known address was listed as 1202 Harrison Street, Pasadena, Texas.

REFERENCES

Houston airtel to Bureau 4/30/57.  
Report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING, 3/29/57, Houston.  
Bureau letter to Houston 3/21/57.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

From: SAC, Memphis

(Your file 131-12)

DATE: July 30, 1957

To: Director, FBI (Bufile and serial 131-363-41)

Subject: SS WILSON B. KEENE, SS HIGHFLYER, SS GRANDCAMP, Limitation of Liability, April 16, and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Republic of Office of Origin: Houston France, Southern Texas, Ad #s 1868, 1869, 1870 ADMIRALTY MATTERS

1. ( ) The deadline in this case has passed and the Bureau has not received a report. You are instructed to submit a report immediately. In the event a report has been submitted, you should make a notation of the date on which it was submitted on this letter and return it to the Bureau, Room No. Room 417.

Report submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Report will be submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for delay \_\_\_\_\_

*heads set out for Richmond  
by Memphis airtels 6/24 & 7/8  
re locating M.J. Thompson,  
Kathleen of Wm. Repton Thompson. No further  
in re location Memphis Division. Houston  
advised of Repton Stokes in both AITs.*

2. ( ) Advise Bureau re status of this case.
3. ( ) Advise Bureau when report may be expected.
4. (U) Surep immediately.

SEARCHED.....	INDEXED.....
SERIALIZED.....	FILED.....
JUL 31 1957	
FBI - MEMPHIS	

(Place your reply on this form and return to the Bureau. Note on the top serial in the case file the receipt and acknowledgment of this communication.)

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : SAC, Knoxville

(Your file 131-4)

DATE: July 30, 1957

FROM : Director, FBI

(Bufile and serial 131-363-41)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENEY, SS HIGHFLYER, SS GRANDCAMP, Limitation of Liability, April 16, and 17, 1947, Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Republic of France, Office of Origin: Houston Southern Texas, Ad. #s 1868, 1869, 1870 ADMIRALTY MATTERS

1. ( ) The deadline in this case has passed and the Bureau has not received a report. You are instructed to submit a report immediately. In the event a report has been submitted, you should make a notation of the date on which it was submitted on this letter and return it to the Bureau, Room No. 3600-114

Report submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Report will be submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for delay

*Thompson located 8-2-57 at E. Ridge, Tenn. Report in process of being prepared.*

*131-4-41*

*ch.*

2. ( ) Advise Bureau re status of this case.
3. ( ) Advise Bureau when report may be expected.
4. ( ) Surep immediately.

(Place your reply on this form and return to the Bureau. Note on the top serial in the case file the receipt and acknowledgment of this communication.)

## FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION


Reporting Office HOUSTON	Office of Origin HOUSTON	Date JUN 17 1957	Investigative Period 5/3,8,14,17,28; 6/3/57
TITLE OF CASE  SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, April 16, and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Republic of France Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870		Report made by JOSEPH J. DOOLING	Typed By: md
		CHARACTER OF CASE  ADMIRALTY MATTERS	
Synopsis: JAMES V. BARRETT presently resides Houston, employed as Second Mate on Lykes Brothers Ship, "HOWELL". JOHN H. WALTERS deceased. Father of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON last known address was Milledgeville, Tennessee.			

- P -

DETAILS: AT HOUSTON, TEXAS:

On May 8, 1957, Mrs. JAMES V. BARRETT, 3306 Southmore Boulevard, was interviewed. She advised that her husband is employed as a Second Mate on the Lykes Brothers Ship, "HOWELL" and is now at sea on that vessel. She advised that her husband is the same individual who was the Chief Mate on the SS HIGHFLYER at the time of explosion.

1-30-S1-103315e  
0-1KV+mz #4

Approved 	Special Agent in Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made:  2-Bureau (131-363) 1-USA, Houston 2-Knoxville 2-Memphis 2-Houston (131-39)		131-363-111	
		RECORDED-57 JUN 20 1957	

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HO 131- 39

On May 17, 1957, Mrs. LAURA BISBEY, 7610 Joplin, advised her former husband, JOHN H. WALTERS was Chief Engineer on the SS HIGHFLYER at the time of the Texas City disaster. JOHN H. WALTERS died in the Marine Hospital in Galveston on May 8, 1952, of cancer.

On May 17, 1957, T-1, who has furnished reliable information in the past, advised he has no record of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON.

On May 17, 1957, Mrs. WILLIAM K. THOMPSON, 2409 Chamberlain, Houston, advised her husband was not a long shoreman at the time of the Texas City explosion.

The following investigation was conducted by Special Agent WILLIAM J. SCHMIDT at Port Arthur, Texas:

On June 3, 1957, LEONARD D. BOSWELL, 202 5th Street, Port Arthur, Texas, was contacted at Local 1029, ILA 424 San Antonio Street, Port Arthur. He advised that the last he knew, WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON, was living in Oakridge, Tennessee. He stated that THOMPSON's father, MARION THOMPSON resides in Milledgeville, Tennessee, and that WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON could probably be located through the father.

- P -

HO 131-39

INFORMANT

T-1        SAM C. JARVIS, Assistant Manager, Texas Employment Agency, Bell and Louisiana Street, Houston, Texas

LEADS

MEMPHIS

AT MILLEDGEVILLE, TENNESSEE

1. Will attempt to locate MARION THOMPSON, father of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON, and obtain from him the present whereabouts of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON.

For your information, WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON was a long shoreman working at the time of the Texas City explosion. He is white male, approximately 36 years of age, his last known residence was Texas City in 1953. The Department desires his reinterview.

2. Will advise the Houston Office of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON whereabouts in order that the necessary signed statement and list of questions to be asked in the interview of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON may be forwarded to the appropriate office.

KNOXVILLE

AT OAKRIDGE, TENNESSEE

1. Will conduct credit and criminal investigation in order to ascertain the whereabouts of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON so that he might be interviewed in instant matter.

2. For your information, WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON was a long shoreman working at the time of the Texas City explosion. He is white male, approximately 36 years of age, his last known residence was Texas City in 1953. The Department desires his reinterview.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

HO 131-39

LEADS

HOUSTON

AT GALVESTON, TEXAS

\*Will ascertain the present address and employment of the former employees of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company as requested by the Department, whose names are set forth in the details of this report.

AT HOUSTON, TEXAS:

\*2. Will reinterview JOE CASH, San Jacinto Building, concerning information pertinent to this case.

\*3. Will review U. S. District Clerk's Docket, Houston, Texas, and report pertinent developments.

REFERENCE

Report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING, 5/14/57, Houston.

ADMINISTRATIVE PAGE

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

DATE: JUL 18 1957

FROM : SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
 SS HIGHFLYER  
 SS GRANDCAMP  
 Limitation of Liability  
 April 16, and 17, 1947  
 Petitions of Lykes Brothers  
 Steamship Company and  
 Republic of France  
 Southern Texas  
 Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870  
 ADMIRALTY MATTERS  
 (Houston - 00)

Re: Report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING, 6/17/57, at Houston.

Enclosed are two reports of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING, at  
 Houston, dated JUL 18 1957.

LEADSHOUSTON:AT HOUSTON, TEXAS:

\*1. Will reinterview JOE CASH, San Jacinto Building,  
 concerning information pertinent to this case.

\*2. Will review U. S. District Clerk's Docket,  
 Houston, Texas, and report pertinent developments.

2 - Bureau (Encls. 2)  
 2 - Houston

JJD/jpf.  
 (4)

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JUL 23 1957

ENCLOSURE

4-1

23 JUL 1957

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# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

REPORTING OFFICE <b>HOUSTON</b>	OFFICE OF ORIGIN <b>HOUSTON</b>	DATE <b>JUL 11 1957</b>	INVESTIGATIVE PERIOD <b>7/11/57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP Limitation of Liability, April 16, and 17, 1947 Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Republic of France</b>		REPORT MADE BY <b>JOSEPH J. DOOLING</b>	TYPED BY <b>jpf.</b>
SYNOPSIS: <b>Southern Texas, Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		CHARACTER OF CASE <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Addresses and employments requested by Department are set out.

- P -

## DETAILS: AT GALVESTON, TEXAS

The following investigation was conducted by Special Agent JOHN E. FRANKLIN:

The addresses of the following individuals were obtained from the City and Telephone Directories of the City of Galveston, Texas:

APPROVED <i>[Signature]</i>	SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACES BELOW	
COPIES MADE: 2 - Bureau (131-363) 1 - USA, Houston 2 - Houston (131-39)		131-363	43 RECORDED - 47
		2 JUL 22 1957	

Captain E. B. HENDRIX  
Port Captain in Marine Department  
Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
Home address, 124 San Marino Drive  
Galveston, Texas

Captain A. K. JOHNSON  
District Manager  
Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
Home address, 5701 Lafitte  
Galveston, Texas

LON M. SMITH  
Port Engineer  
Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
Home address, 1719 Hawthorne  
La Marque, Texas

ED. A. HARPER  
Port Engineer  
Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
1400 Bowie Drive, Home address  
Galveston, Texas

WILLIAM F. CRISS  
Dock Superintendent  
Southern Stevedore Company  
(owned by Lykes Brothers Steamship Company)  
Home address, 2524 Avenue Q $\frac{1}{2}$   
Galveston, Texas

Captain ROBERT C. TOWNSEND  
Captain, Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
Home address, 3017 Avenue O  
Galveston, Texas  
(This man is a ship Captain)

HARRY K. GROTEMAT (Deceased)  
Formerly employed Lykes Brothers Steamship Company

HO 131-39

Mr. C. J. SWEENEY  
Manager  
Claims and Insurance Division  
Lykes Brothers Steamship Company  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
(Source CHARLES KESTLER, Danner Marine  
Guard Service)

- P -

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
INTERVIEW REPORT

WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON, who resides at 1613 Prigmore Street, East Ridge, Tennessee, and is employed at Walt's Texaco, 3352 Ringgold Road, East Ridge, Tennessee, stated on 3/2/57, that he hopes to maintain this as his permanent address, but that in the event he moves he can be located through his mother-in-law, Mrs. MINNIE BARKER, 235 Central Avenue, Athens, Tennessee. THOMPSON related his activities on the morning of April 16, 1947, substantially as contained in the statement furnished by him to SAs LEO K. COOK and ROY T. EDONAN on March 6, 1948. He was then shown this statement, and after reading the statement, he stated that it contains the facts as he recalls them.

THOMPSON stated that the nitrate was in heavy paper sacks, each containing about 90 or 100 pounds. He stated that the sacks were first loaded on wooden trays on the dock and the tray with the nitrate was then lifted onto the ship with a winch. The trays were then unloaded in the holds of the ship where the fertilizer was stored. There were about eight men in each hold and two men lifted each bag when unloading the trays. The sacks were stacked to the top of the hold completely filling the hold, the men always working on top of the last layer of sacks.

The holds where the nitrate was stored was about 40 feet square and were possibly 40 feet deep. The No. 4 hold was about half loaded when the fire was discovered.

THOMPSON stated that he is of the opinion that all eight of the men working in No. 4 hold were in the hold when the fire was discovered. He stated that they had just arrived for work and hadn't received their first tray when they discovered the fire. He stated that the nitrate in the hold had been loaded the previous afternoon. He stated that he didn't see anyone in or around the hold when they first entered for work. He expressed the belief that the same eight men were present who had worked that hold on the previous day. He expressed the belief that the fire was 10 or 12 feet below the level of the top row of sacks.

---

Interview with WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON File # 131-4  
on 3/2/57 at East Ridge, Tennessee  
by Special Agents EDER PATTERSON and M. JAY HAWKINS

He advised that some members of the French crew arrived on the scene about the time that the fire extinguisher arrived. He stated that members of the crew spoke in French and he was unable to understand anything they were saying. He stated that the longshoreman foreman ordered his men out of the hold and they left the French crew to fight the fire. He expressed the belief that it was about 15 to 20 minutes from the time the fire was discovered until the time members of the French crew arrived. He stated that everyone seemed very hesitant about fighting the fire as they were afraid of damaging the cargo and they didn't seem to know how to fight the fire.

THOMPSON stated that after all the men were out, they put the hatch covers on and then put tarpaulins over the hatch covers and then put weights over the hatch covers. He stated that he then heard someone mention that the crew was turning steam into the hold to fight the fire.

THOMPSON stated that he had loaded Ammonium Nitrate before but does not recall what ships he loaded it on and does not recall whether or not they were French ships. He stated that the loading conditions were always about the same on all ships and that the crews of the ships never supervised the loading on any ship he worked on, as this was left to the longshoremen and their foreman. He stated that he had worked the waterfront from 6/19/46, to the date of the fire, 4/16/47.

THOMPSON estimated that about 25 or 30 minutes passed from the time the fire was discovered until the hatches were fastened down. He stated that he left the ship and was approximately one half mile away when the explosion occurred.

THOMPSON stated that he had no conversation with any members of the crew of the Grand Camp as the ones he saw spoke only French.

He stated that they did not receive any specific instructions about smoking on the Grand Camp, but that they

had definite instructions against smoking on the wharf, in the warehouse, or on the ships. He stated that he never saw these smoking regulations violated.

TOMPSON stated that he completed two years of high school. He stated that he has no objection to testifying in this matter.

- RUC -

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI

DATE: 8/12/57

FROM : SAC, KNOXVILLE

SUBJECT:

SS WILSON B. KEENE

SS HIGHFLYER

SS GRANDCAMP

Limitation of Liability,

April 16, and 17, 1947

Petitions of Lykes Brothers

Steamship Company and

Republic of France

Southern Texas,

Admiralty Nos. 1868, 1869, 1870

ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Enclosed herewith are two copies of the report of SA EBER PATTERSON dated 8/12/57, at Knoxville.

ADMINISTRATIVE

The signed statement of WILLIAM KEETON THOMPSON taken by SAs LEO K. COOK and ROY T. NOONAN March 6, 1948, is being returned to Houston as an enclosure with this letter.

REFERENCES

Report SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING dated 6/17/57, st Houston.  
Houston airtel to KX dated 7/20/57.

- 2 - Bureau (131-363) (Encls. 2)  
2 - Houston (131-39) (Encls. 3) (RM)  
1 - Knoxville (131-4)

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(5)

RECORDED - 23

EX-137

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JBS

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Date: 10/17/57

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via AIRTEL AIRMAIL  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Ladd	_____
Mr. Clegg	_____
Mr. Glavin	_____
Mr. Harbo	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Winterrowd	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

RE : SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER  
(OO: Houston)

ReBulet to Houston 10/16/57.

Relet reflects all investigation this matter to be in the Houston Division with the exception of the interviews of ARTHUR CLARK and Captain EMMETT M. DIERLAN, both of Brownsville, Texas. AUSA JAMES E. ROSS, who is handling this matter in Houston, and DALE GREEN, Department Attorney who is handling this case in Washington, discussed this matter telephonically on 10/16/57, and both have requested if possible that SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING, to whom this case is assigned, handle the interviews with ARTHUR CLARK and Captain DIERLAN in Brownsville. Both AUSA ROSS and Mr. GREEN feel that both these witnesses could be extremely valuable in the trial of this case. AUSA ROSS and DALE GREEN feel that the Agent to whom this case is assigned who is thoroughly familiar with all the ramifications should conduct these too important interviews.

UACB SA DOOLING will proceed to Brownsville on Wednesday, 10/23/57, to conduct these two interviews.

RECORDED-54

131-363-46 JHD

- 3 - Bureau (AM)
- 2 - San Antonio (131-5)
- 1 - Houston

JJD:krs/mec

(6)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_

Per \_\_\_\_\_

C. J. ... 10/30/57



F B I

Date:

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via \_\_\_\_\_  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

San Antonio should check to determine if witnesses CLARK and Captain DIERLAN will be available on Wednesday, 10/23/57, or Thursday, 10/24/57, and advise this office in the event either or both of these witnesses will not be available.

For the information of San Antonio, CLARK resides 349 E. 9th Street, Brownsville, and is employed Maritime Association of Brownsville. Captain DIERLAN is employed as maritime surveyor, street address unknown.

HAWKINS

- 2 -

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

SAC, Houston (131-39)

10/16/57

Director, FBI (131-363)

131-363-47  
SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

Enclosed herewith are 2 copies for Houston Office and 1 copy for San Antonio Office of a self-explanatory memorandum dated October 14, 1957 from George Cochran Doub, Assistant Attorney General, requesting additional investigation in this matter.

Your attention is directed to item 6 on page 8 of the attached memo. Reports should not contain any evaluation of the potentiality as good witnesses of the persons interviewed. Furnish a blank memorandum, suitable for dissemination, setting out agent's observations regarding these persons. Include appearance, manner of speaking, ability of the persons to express themselves, education and any other observations which would permit the Department to evaluate them as witnesses.

Both offices should afford this matter preferred and continuous attention and submit reports to reach the Bureau not later than 11/4/57.

Enclosures (2)

2 cc: San Antonio (131-5) (Enclosure)

ECP:eem  
(6)



Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
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Boardman \_\_\_\_\_  
Belmont \_\_\_\_\_  
Mason \_\_\_\_\_  
Mohr \_\_\_\_\_  
Parsons \_\_\_\_\_  
Rosen \_\_\_\_\_  
Tamm \_\_\_\_\_  
Nease \_\_\_\_\_  
Winterrowd \_\_\_\_\_  
Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

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SAC, Houston (131-39)

48

SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHLYER  
SS GRAND CAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

Reurairtel 10/31/57.

Your office is instructed to interview J. D. Latta as requested in departmental letter of October 14, 1957. Before conducting interview it should be discreetly determined whether this interview would have an adverse effect on his physical condition. In reporting results of Latta interview, a statement should be incorporated concerning his physical condition, since the Department may desire to take a deposition from him at a later date.

Hoover

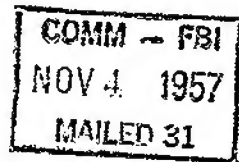
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Tolson \_\_\_\_\_  
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Tele. Room \_\_\_\_\_  
Holloman \_\_\_\_\_  
Gandy \_\_\_\_\_

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67 NOV 6 1957

F B I

Date: 10/31/57

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via AIRTEL AIRMAIL  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Nichols	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Winterrowd	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. H. H. Hansen	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-33)

FROM: SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRAND CAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTER  
(OO-Houston)

Re Department letter to the Director, 10/14/57.

Referenced letter requests J. D. LATTA be located and interviewed and the files of J. D. LATTA to be located and examined, as set forth in Paragraph 2, Page 3.

On 10/30/57 MERRITT J. WOLF, former office manager for J. D. LATTA & CO., Houston office, advised records of company destroyed as trash about 6 years ago when company went out of business and he can so testify.

Also advises J. D. LATTA, aged 70, who has in the past year lost approximately 110 pounds, is now suffering from dropsy, having recently been released from the hospital. He cannot walk. WOLF doubts if LATTA could ever testify to any matter because of his physical condition.

Bureau requested to contact Department and ascertain if interview with LATTA is now necessary. It should be noted LATTA is residing on a ranch known as T-O Ranch, Medina, Texas.

HAWKINS

3-Bureau (AM)  
1-San Antonio (Info.)(131-5)  
1-Houston  
JJD: krs  
(5)

RECORDED - 52

NOV 12 1957

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M

Per \_\_\_\_\_

Special Agent in Charge

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>HOUSTON</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>7/20, 22; 8/14; 9/1, 5, 13, 19, 21, 24, 25; 10/11, 17, 22-24/57</b>	Investigative Period
TITLE OF CASE  <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE SS HIGHFLYER SS GRANDCAMP, ETC. ADMIRALTY NUMBERS 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		Report made by <b>JOSEPH J. DOOLING (A)</b>	Typed By: <b>krs.</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE  <b>ADMIRALTY MATTER</b>	

Synopsis:

ARTHUR CLARK, Brownsville, Texas, interviewed and supplied information requested where known. Captain EMMETT M. DIERLAM, Brownsville, Texas, interviewed. DIERLAM states Texas City explosion caused by telephone strike in Texas City, because PETE SUDERMAN, Stevedore Superintendent, conferred with French captain concerning fighting the fire prior to explosion and attempted to contact Capt. DIERLAM as to how to fight fire prior to explosion but unable due to telephone strike. Capt. DIERLAM talked to PETE SUDERMAN in hospital after explosion and told the captain how the fire had been fought whereupon DIERLAM told SUDERMAN not to tell anyone what happened. DIERLAM claims fire should have been fought by carrying vessel out into turning basin, opening the hatches, and flooding with water.

DETAILS: The docket in the U. S. District Clerk's Office in instant matter was checked on July 20, 1957, and September 25, 1957. The docket reflects this matter has been set for trial concerning the limitation of liability suit

Approved <i>[Signature]</i>	Special Agent In Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made:  2-Bureau (131-363) — 1-USA, Houston — 3-Houston (131-39) —		131-363-49	RECORDED-38 EL-137
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HO 131-39

initiated by the French Government. The date of this trial is March 4, 1958.

On September 5 and 13, 1957, efforts to locate ARTHUR CLARK at his residence, 4731 Park Drive, Houston, Texas, were unsuccessful.

On September 13, 1957, JOE CASH, Attorney, San Jacinto Building, advised he was unable to locate the name of the individual who had heard two explosions during the Texas City disaster. However, he will continue to search for his records in this regard.

On September 19, 21, 23, and 24, 1957, instant case was discussed with Departmental Attorney DALE GREEN, who is handling this matter. Mr. GREEN advised that he would request additional investigation and he desired SA DOOLING to interview ARTHUR CLARK and Captain DIERLAM, both of Brownsville, Texas.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
INTERVIEW REPORT

It was ascertained from ADOLPH DONALD SUDERMAN, JR., that ARTHUR CLARK resided in Brownsville, Texas, and was connected with the Maritime Association in Brownsville for employment. Further, that Captain DIERLAM was also a surveyor residing in Brownsville, Texas.

This information was obtained from Mr. SUDERMAN, who advised that he was on the GRANDCAMP once or perhaps twice before the explosion. As he recalls it, he was on the vessel with the surveyor, Captain DIERLAM. Mr. SUDERMAN stated that he did not go down in the hold of the vessel and did not eat on the vessel.

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Interview with ADOLPH DONALD SUDERMAN, JR.      File #HO 131-39  
on 9/24/57      at National Bank Building; Galveston, Texas  
By Special Agent JOSEPH J. DOOLING

Property of FBI - This report is loaned to you by the FBI,  
and neither it nor its contents are to be distributed outside  
the agency to which loaned.

HO 131-39

On October 17, 1957, instant case and Departmental memorandum dated October 14, 1957, were discussed with Mr. JAMES E. ROSS, Assistant U. S. Attorney, Southern District of Texas, Houston. Mr. ROSS made available the Coast Guard hearing transcript which included the testimony of ARTHUR CLARK and Captain DIERLAM. Mr. ROSS requested that these interviews be conducted by SA DOOLING because both he and Mr. GREEN felt that these witnesses could be extremely valuable and that the Agent conducting the interview should be familiar with the ramifications of the case.

By communication dated October 21, 1957, the San Antonio Office advised the present residences and employments of Mr. CLARK and Captain DIERLAM, and advised that these men would be available for interview on October 23 and 24, 1957.



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
INTERVIEW REPORT

ARTHUR ERNEST CLARK, Room 406 Pan-American Building, 11th and Elizabeth Streets, Brownsville, Texas, is employed at that address by the BROWNSVILLE MARITIME ASSOCIATION, INC. He resides at 344 East 9th Street, Brownsville, Texas. CLARK made the following statements:

On January 1, 1946, until the latter part of 1949 he was the office manager of J. D. LATTA COMPANY in Galveston, Texas. During part or all of that time, there were four women employed in that office: Mrs. LOUISE REESBY - now employed by HENRY SCHURIG, Cotton Exchange Building, Galveston, Texas; Miss DOROTHY CARTER, who later married and may be still in the Galveston, Texas, area; and two other women whose names CLARK could not recall.

All the records of J. D. LATTA COMPANY, Galveston office, were shipped to that company's office in Houston, Texas, about December, 1949. Therefore, any documents concerning the Texas City explosion would have been included in this move. ARTHUR CLARK did not keep any of the original records or copies, and does not know of any such records, and does not know of their present location. CLARK introduced some records of J. D. LATTA COMPANY at both hearings in which he testified concerning the Texas City explosion, however, all of these records were returned to J. D. LATTA COMPANY after the hearings.

J. D. LATTA closed his business in late 1949 and CLARK believes he is operating a ranch at Kerrville or Junction, Texas. BOB TAYLOR of the BLOOMFIELD STEAMSHIP COMPANY, Cotton Exchange Building, Houston, Texas, may know the exact address of J. D. LATTA and the address of Mr. WOLF. WOLF, whose initials may be M. J., was the office manager in Houston, Texas, for J. D. LATTA.

---

Interview with ARTHUR ERNEST CLARK File #HO 131-39

on 10/23/57 at 11th and Elizabeth Streets, Brownsville, Texas  
by Special Agent JOSEPH J. DOOLING  
Property of FBI - This report is loaned to you by the FBI,  
and neither it nor its contents are to be distributed  
outside the agency to which loaned.

J. D. LATTA COMPANY was a freight forwarder. Their biggest account or client was the French Government. A freight forwarder represents the shipper, in this case, the French Government. Part of the duties of a freight forwarder is the tracing of shipments to the port, the collecting of the cargo at the port, and the storing of the cargo at the port prior to the loading aboard a vessel.

The French Supply Council was the purchasing agent for the French Government. The French Supply Council had various departments that channeled different-type cargoes. CLARK had all his dealings with the French Supply Council in their New York City office. These dealings were by telephone and later confirmed in writing. CLARK telephonically dealt with a Mr. MOUNTFORD of the French Supply Council on all cargoes except cotton. CLARK cannot recall the French Supply Council employee who handled the cotton cargoes. CLARK recalls talking to MOUNTFORD sometimes three or four times a day concerning the cargoes.

E. S. BINNINGS AND COMPANY was the steamship agent for the French Supply Council. As agent, they were in charge of the cargo while the vessel was in port. BINNINGS AND CO. was responsible for the counting and loading of the cargoes. CLARK dealt with a Mr. WESTERMAN of BINNINGS. WESTERMAN was in Galveston, Texas, and all conversations were telephonic, later confirmed in writing.

CLARK believed ODOM LACY of E. S. BINNINGS AND CO. would know the present whereabouts of Mr. WESTERMAN

The French Supply Council designated the vessel on which the cargo would be stored, it being noted that both the HIGHFLYER and the GRANDCAMP were shipping ammonium nitrate for the French Government at approximately the same time. The bill of lading reflecting the ocean shipment, commonly referred to as the ocean bill of lading, was typed by J. D. LATTA; however, the information typed on the ocean bill of lading was that described by the French Supply Council. J. D. LATTA CO. was handling the cargo for all 3 vessels involved at the time of the explosion and J. D. LATTA CO. had been the freight forwarder on shipments of ammonium nitrate to France prior to the explosion.

HO 131-39

CLARK recalls the cargo involved in the explosion, as being described as ammonium nitrate fertilizer. However, after the Texas City explosion similar shipments were described in the same way but adding in brackets "oxidizing material".

HO 131-39

At this point in the interview with ARTHUR CLARK, Mr. CLARK received a telephone call from Captain DIERLAM. the captain advised CLARK that he know that an FBI Agent desired to interview him and that, he, DIERLAM, was pressed for time. Therefore, the interview with CLARK was terminated temporarily.

Captain EMMETT M. DIERLAM and his son operate a firm known as DIERLAM & DIERLAM, Room 509, First National Bank Building, Brownsville, Texas. Captain DIERLAM resides at 204 Boca Chica Boulevard, Brownsville, Texas. DIERLAM & DIERLAM are surveyors for the NATIONAL CARGO BUREAU, INC., and a correspondent to the Board of Underwriters of New York. DIERLAM related the following facts:

Prior to and after the Texas City explosion, DIERLAM was a surveyor for the organization now known as the Board of Underwriters of New York. In such capacity, he inspected the GRANDCAMP in Texas City at the berth where it exploded. Captain ROBERT L. WYNNE, employed at that time by the same firm, had inspected the vessel in Houston prior to DIERLAM's inspection. WYNNE can now be found on the ground floor of the Cotton Exchange Building in Houston.

Captain DIERLAM inspected the vessel and drew a plan of the vessel, as is customary. This plan showed the general cargo arrangement and any unusual features of the vessel. The plan should be filed in the office of the Board of Underwriters of New York City in Galveston, Texas. Captain DIERLAM issued a pass at the time of his inspection. The stub of this pass should probably be located in the same office as the plan of the vessel.

DIERLAM can recall the inspection of the GRANDCAMP as it took place on a Sunday night about 6:45 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. This Sunday night was the Sunday prior to the explosion. The inspection took approximately 25-30 minutes and the purpose was to see that the holds were clean, dry, and free of debris. DIERLAM does not believe that he went down into the bottom of the hold but went 'tween decks and looked into the bottom of the hold. The vessel had some cargo aboard at the time of the inspection which was Houston cargo and possibly some Texas City cargo. Captain DIERLAM does not recall if there was anything in Hold #4 at the time of his inspection.

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Interview with EMMETT M. DIERLAM File #HO 131-39  
on 10/23/57 at First National Bank Building, Brownsville, Texas  
by Special Agent JOSEPH J. DOOLING

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Captain DIERLAM stated that had he seen the door in Hold #4 leading to the engine room or some storage room built into Hold #4, it would have been unusual for a Liberty-type ship. Therefore, had it existed in Hold #4 and had he noticed it, he would have so marked it on his plan of the vessel. Captain DIERLAM can not now recall if he did note this unusual structure in Hold #4.

DIERLAM cannot recall if Hold #4 contained any cargo, but the skin was broom clean. He does not recall if there was any dunnage aboard Hold #4 at the time of the inspection. The battens are clear in the Captain's recollection, but he does not now believe them to have been old at the time of his inspection. They were in place at that time and had some battens been missing, dunnage would have been put in its place. The purpose of the battens was to keep the paper from the shell frame of the vessel because of sweating or condensation. The paper most likely would have been of a heavy kraft type, which, of course, is combustible, as are the wooden battens.

Captain DIERLAM cannot specifically recall the other holds on the GRANDCAMP, but believes that they were probably about the same as he described Hold #4.

Concerning additional entrances to Hold #4, Captain DIERLAM could relate no more than has previously been set forth in this interview.

Captain DIERLAM stated that there was some ammunition aboard the GRANDCAMP. This was small-arms type ammunition in boxes. It was in Hold #5 between decks and was so marked on the boxes that it was small-arms ammunition. DIERLAM did not pay much attention to it. He stated that Hold #5 could only be entered from topside. Concerning any wines or liquors in Hold #4, DIERLAM could relate no more than he previously stated concerning that hold.

Captain DIERLAM does not now recall the Coast Guard regulations concerning a hazardous cargo and does not know whether he recalled such regulations at the time of his inspection of the GRANDCAMP. He did not discuss the nature

or characteristics of the cargo with the captain of the GRANDCAMP or the chief officer of that vessel. The captain of the vessel did speak English and DIERLAM most likely talked to him at the time of his inspection. There was, however, no discussion concerning the stowage, fire prevention, or fire fighting during this conversation.

Concerning the "No Smoking" signs aboard the GRANDCAMP, DIERLAM does not recall specifically at this time but normally on vessels carrying cotton he insists on "No Smoking" signs. He did not recall anyone smoking aboard the vessel when he was aboard. To his knowledge, the water and steam system was in operation at the time of the inspection; however, he did not test it. Regarding the instructions posted as to the use of fire fighting equipment, Captain DIERLAM does not now think that they were posted at the time that he inspected the vessel. This vessel was a Liberty ship and had the standard equipment of such vessels. DIERLAM cannot give an opinion as to the effectiveness of the ship's crew and equipment regarding fire fighting aboard that vessel.

The documents which Captain DIERLAM prepared as a result of his inspection have been previously commented upon.

Captain DIERLAM was employed at the time of his inspection by the New York Board of Underwriters. He normally inspected up to 150 vessels per month and some of those vessels were French. The GRANDCAMP, being a Liberty-type ship, was standard and could be compared to a similar vessel of that type.

Captain DIERLAM has not been interviewed by anyone representing the petitioners to date.

During the interview, Captain DIERLAM he could give his opinion as to the cause of the disaster. He stated the Texas City disaster was the result of a telephone strike in Texas City on that day. DIERLAM had received special instructions from the New York Board of Underwriters as to fighting a nitrate fire aboard a vessel. These instructions did not just apply to ammonium nitrate, but applied to any nitrate fire. These instructions were brought about because of a fire in Baltimore. The



Captain does not know of a copy of these instructions, but summarized them by stating that in a nitrate fire the vessel should be taken away from the dock and hoses placed down into the hold and sea water or fresh water should be pumped in. This applies to all nitrates, in the Captain's opinion. These fire-fighting instructions never mentioned steam and Captain DIERLAM would never use steam under such circumstances. The reason for not using steam was because of the fact that steam raises the temperature of the fire and does not kill the fire concerning nitrates, and, therefore, he would sum it up by stating that it would never be used, had his advice been asked.

DIERLAM stated that PETE SUDERMAN of the Stevedoring Company was aboard the vessel when the fire broke out. The captain of the vessel asked SUDERMAN what to do. SUDERMAN attempted to contact Captain DIERLAM by telephone concerning the fire in Hold #4 but it was impossible to do so because of the telephone strike. SUDERMAN then returned to the vessel and discussed the problem with the captain of the vessel. Captain DIERLAM received this information from SUDERMAN while SUDERMAN was in the hospital just after the explosion. At that time, PETE SUDERMAN told Captain DIERLAM, "I sure wish I could have gotten hold of you". DIERLAM stated that if he had gotten hold of Captain DIERLAM on the telephone and told him it was a nitrate fire, he, DIERLAM, would have instructed him to open the hatches, let out any gases which may have accumulated, and pump water into the fire and get the vessel away from its dock. Captain DIERLAM told PETE SUDERMAN after this conversation in the hospital not to mention these facts to anyone, DIERLAM's only intention being that PETE SUDERMAN may be blamed for the entire Texas City disaster. Captain DIERLAM states he is relating these facts now because he believes that they had probably come out in the past.

Captain DIERLAM stated that concerning the SS HIGHFLYER, he had inspected this vessel but was not contacted at the time of the explosion concerning the fire aboard that vessel. He stated that the two port captains for LYKES BROS. took over the fire fighting aboard the HIGHFLYER and they never consulted him as to the proper method to fight the fire. He added that they should have sunk that vessel if they could



HO 131-39

not have taken it away from the pier.

Captain DIERLAM states that the cargo concerned in these vessels in regard to his fire-fighting comments was ammonium nitrate. It was commonly referred to as fertilizer but had marked on it the percentage of ammonium nitrate contained. Captain DIERLAM stated the instructions concerning ammonium nitrate were first put out a number of years ago as a result of the fire in Baltimore and he believes these instructions were put out by the old Board of Underwriters in New York City.

At the conclusion of the interview, Captain DIERLAM stated that he would be willing to sign a statement concerning the facts previously reported, however, at that time his wife was ill in a hospital in Galveston, Texas, and he, Captain DIERLAM, was proceeding from Brownsville to Galveston to visit his wife. Further, he stated that on the following day he had a schedule on the waterfront which would not permit him to take time out for further interview. He stated that because of his tight schedule, he did not desire to sign a statement at that time but would do so in the future if requested.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
INTERVIEW REPORT

ARTHUR ERNEST CLARK, Room 406 Pan-American Building, 11th and Elizabeth Streets, Brownsville, Texas, made the following statements concerning the ammonium nitrate fertilizer:

The ocean bill of lading was described the way the French Supply Council desired it to be described, that is, ammonium nitrate fertilizer. The rail bill of lading, to the best of CLARK's recollection, was described the same way. Prior to the Texas City explosion, CLARK could not be sure, but did not think it had been referred to as an oxidizing material. CLARK said that the oxidizing material was added to the bill of lading after the explosion and LYKES BROS. requested this immediately after the explosion. THOMPSON of LYKES BROS. told CLARK that their (LYKES BROS.) attorneys wanted it that way. CLARK stated he did not know it was an oxidizing material prior to the explosion, nor that it was classified as dangerous or a "red label" cargo. By "red label" CLARK meant small-arms ammunition, dynamite, magnesium, and other such items. CLARK stated that he did not recall handling any nitrates other than ammonium nitrate.

The French Supply Council was the only shipper represented by J. D. LATTE, to CLARK's knowledge, who handled ammonium nitrate, and he, CLARK, thinks the explosion was the result of sabotage because he had never considered ammonium nitrate as an explosive and he still does not consider it as an explosive.

In regard to the description ammonium nitrate "oxidizing material", CLARK stated that he could not recall this description prior to the explosion and he did not have copies of the bills of lading. Therefore, he could supply no light on this matter without such copies of bills of lading. CLARK stated that he did not have any conversation with

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Interview with ARTHUR ERNEST CLARK      File #HO 131-39

on 10/24/57              at 11th and Elizabeth Streets; Brownsville,  
Texas

by Special Agent JOSEPH J. DOOLING

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officials of the French Supply Council which would show that they knew the material to be an oxidizing material and classified as hazardous cargo by the Coast Guard regulations.

CLARK, handling the cargo of ammonium nitrate at Texas City, knew of his own knowledge that both the GRANDCAMP and the HIGHFLYER had ammonium nitrate board. LYKES BROS. got delivery orders for so many tons of ammonium nitrate prior to the loading. J. D. LATTA AND CO. gave this information to LYKES BROS. in order for them to load the cargo. As a matter of fact, the HIGHFLYER was loaded with ammonium nitrate prior to the GRANDCAMP and the HIGHFLYER had to be moved from the pier in order to allow the GRANDCAMP to move into position to be loaded.

CLARK stated that LYKES BROS. knew of the cargo on the GRANDCAMP because everyone in the area knew that ammonium nitrate was moving and because of the fact that the HIGHFLYER had to move from Pier 0 in order to make room for the GRANDCAMP to load. To the best of CLARK's recollection there was nothing else on Pier 0 except ammonium nitrate. There was no flour there because ammonium nitrate would liquefy when it got cool. It looked like somebody poured water on it, and, therefore, no flour could be stored in the same area as ammonium nitrate. CLARK stated concerning this cooling of ammonium nitrate when ammonium nitrate arrived in the Texas City area by railroad car it was so hot in the box car that the box car had to be opened for about half a day to allow the car to cool in order that the men could move the box car. CLARK explained he had gone down to the area on one occasion and saw some of these box cars opened to cool off. He went into the box car himself. He said it was hot but one could touch the bags at the time he was in the box car. CLARK could not explain the reason for the heating but he said that when it cooled off to his knowledge, it did not heat up again.

CLARK stated that he had no records in his possession at this time and did not know how the LION OIL COMPANY was involved in the ammonium nitrate shipments. He stated that on some of the documents there appeared the capital letters "NOIBN". He states this means "Not otherwise identified by name".

CLARK stated that he never talked to either one of the captains involved in the Texas City explosion and that he never went to Texas City during the pertinent period of time. All the transactions in the immediate dock area were handled by a man by the name of JOHN MAJOR. MAJOR was a J. D. LATTA company employee near Pier O, and CLARK had all his conversations with MAJOR by telephone. It was MAJOR who talked to the longshoremen concerning loading and other necessary details.

After the fire was discovered on the GRANDCAMP but prior to the explosion, CLARK called JOHN MAJOR. The purpose of the call was to ascertain the reason for the smoke in the Texas City area. CLARK asked MAJOR what was going on. MAJOR replied to the effect that the GRANDCAMP was on fire and that "they", meaning everyone, were pulling everything out of the waterfront area, that is, engines, cars, and other moveable equipment. According to MAJOR, this was being done in case anything happened. MAJOR did not explain to CLARK what he meant by "anything happen" and CLARK did not query him on this point. MAJOR told CLARK that the fire engines were there at the time of the telephone call.

CLARK did not have anything to do with the actual loading of the cargo himself and had no knowledge or instructions concerning the preventing or fighting of fires where ammonium nitrate was involved. CLARK pointed out that he was never on either the HIGHFLYER or the GRANDCAMP.

CLARK concluded by stating that he had no knowledge of what cargo had been previously loaded on the GRANDCAMP prior to its loading in Texas City.

At the conclusion of the interview, CLARK was requested to furnish a signed statement as to the facts he had given. CLARK's reply was that a signed statement was not necessary. He stated he had told the truth in the oral interview and that he had previously testified under oath to these same facts and he did not now feel it was necessary to sign a statement to these facts.

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

DATE: 10/16/57

FROM : SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NUMBERS 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS  
(OO-Houston)

Enclosed herewith to the Bureau are two copies  
of the report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING, Houston, dated  
and two copies of each of two letterhead memoranda  
dated 10/16/57.

LEADSHOUSTON

1. Will locate and interview EDWARD WESTERMAN;  
as requested in referenced Departmental letter.
2. Will locate and interview W. A. SANDBERG;  
Galveston, Texas; as requested in referenced Departmental  
letter.
3. Will attempt to locate and interview other  
employees of J. D. LATTA COMPANY; if necessary in order to  
locate the original records of that company.

REFERENCES

Bureau letter to Houston; 10/16/57.

Departmental letter to Bureau; 10/14/57.

2-Bureau (Encl. 6) (131-363)

3-Houston

JJD: krs

(5)

RECORDED-38

131-363-50

6 ENCLOSURE  
38  
76 NOV 14 1957



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Houston, Texas

In Reply, Please Refer to  
File No. 131-39

30 1957

RE: Captain EMMET M. DIERLAM

Captain DIERLAM is a marine surveyor who holds a Master's Certificate. He is a man of approximately 65 years of age who has spent his entire life at sea or connected with shipping vessels. He has held his Master's Certificate since 1923, having sailed on sailing vessels and steamships. He has been a marine surveyor since May, 1936, except during World War II when he was a lieutenant commander and a commander in the U. S. Navy. His entire adult life has been connected with the shipping industry maritime activities.

Captain DIERLAM is to be considered an excellent speaker and gives the impression of thinking out each answer prior to answering the question. He expresses himself well and presents a good over-all appearance. He is over six feet tall, heavy set, is a large man with gray, thinning hair and mustache. He would be considered an excellent witness.

11/12/57

131-363-50

ENCLOSURE



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Houston, Texas

In Reply, Please Refer to  
File No. 131-39

NOV 2 1957

RE: ARTHUR ERNEST CLARK

ARTHUR CLARK is approximately 70 years of age, of medium build and stature. He has been in the shipping business since 1904, having started as a longshoreman and advanced to office manager for various shipping agents. He was employed by one such agent for 31 years. CLARK is a man of average appearance; he is extremely cooperative. He is, however, hard of hearing and did not wear a hearing aid. It, therefore, became necessary to speak in a loud, booming voice and even on such occasions he did not hear the question.

CLARK would be considered to be a fair witness.

100  
11/12/57  
11/12/57  
11/12/57

131-363-50

ENCLOSURE

F B I

Date: 11/7/57

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via AIRTEL AIR MAIL  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Nease	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Mr. Clayton	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

FROM : SAC, HOUSTON (131-39)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRAND CAMP, ETC.  
ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Re: Houston airtel to Director, 10/31/57.

By airtel 11/4/57 the Bureau advised Houston as follows:

"Your office is instructed to interview J. D. Latta as requested in departmental letter of October 14, 1957. Before conducting interview it should be discreetly determined whether this interview would have an adverse effect on his physical condition. In reporting results of Latta interview, a statement should be incorporated concerning his physical condition, since the Department may desire to take a deposition from him at a later date."

SAN ANTONIO -AT MEDINA, TEXAS

Will discreetly determine whether this interview would have an adverse effect on the physical condition of J. D. LATTA and immediately advise the Houston Office.

- ③ - Bureau (AM)  
2 - San Antonio (131-5) (AM)  
1 - Houston

JJD:mam  
(6)

RECORDED - 9

NOV 15 1957

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge



F B I

Date:

Transmit the following in \_\_\_\_\_  
(Type in plain text or code)Via \_\_\_\_\_  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

HO 131-39

In the event such an interview would not have an adverse effect on J. D. LATTA the Houston office will have SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING conduct this interview immediately as per Bureau instructions.

- 2 -

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M Per \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Agent in Charge

F B I

Date: 11/18/57

Transmit the following in PLAIN TEXT  
(Type in plain text or code)Via AIRTEL AIRMAIL  
(Priority or Method of Mailing)

Mr. Tolson	_____
Mr. Boardman	_____
Mr. Belmont	_____
Mr. Mohr	_____
Mr. Nease	_____
Mr. Parsons	_____
Mr. Rosen	_____
Mr. Tamm	_____
Mr. Trotter	_____
Mr. Clayton	_____
Tele. Room	_____
Mr. Holloman	_____
Miss Gandy	_____

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)  
 FROM: SAC, SAN ANTONIO (131-5)  
 RE: S. S. WILSON B. KEENE  
       S. S. HIGHFLYER  
       S. S. GRAND CAMP, etc.  
       ADMIRALTY NOS. 1868, 1869, 1870  
       ADMIRALTY MATTERS

Re Houston airtel to Bureau dated 11/7/57.

Dr. HUGH A. DRANE, JR., Kerrville, Texas, advised SA JOSEPH C. WEBB, JR. instant date that he last examined J. D. LATTA in July, 1957. LATTA suffering from heart and liver diseases.

Dr. DRANE advised he felt an interview with J. D. LATTA would not jeopardize his present physical condition. He suggested that if feasible, Mrs. J. D. LATTA be contacted prior to interview in order to prepare LATTA mentally for the interview.

Houston Office will advise San Antonio if any contact with Mrs. J. D. LATTA is desired before interview of LATTA by SA DOOLING.

RECORDED-87

BLAYLOCK

NOV 19 1957

- ③ - Bureau (AM)  
 2 - Houston (AM) (131-39)  
 1 - San Antonio

JCW:mkd  
 (6)

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Agent in Charge

Sent \_\_\_\_\_ M

Per \_\_\_\_\_

# FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Reporting Office <b>DALLAS</b>	Office of Origin <b>HOUSTON</b>	Date <b>11-18-57</b>	Investigative Period <b>11-13,14-57</b>
TITLE OF CASE <b>SS WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIGHFLYER; SS GRANDCAMP, Limitation of Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947; Petitions of Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Republic of France Southern Texas Admiralty Numbers 1868, 1869, 1870</b>		Report made by <b>B. TOM CARTER</b>	Typed By: <b>nec</b>
		CHARACTER OF CASE  <b>ADMIRALTY MATTERS</b>	

Synopsis:

MRS. LOUISE REESBY, Ft. Worth, Texas, furnished information concerning identity and possible location of former employees of J. D. LATTA. She was employed as a clerk in the Galveston Office of J. D. LATTA, which was a forwarding company that was dissolved about 1949. She does not know what happened to the records of the company. She stated while employed by J. D. LATTA, she never heard anything and never read any correspondence indicating that ammonium nitrate was dangerous.

- RUC -

Approved <i>C. W. K.</i>	Special Agent In Charge	Do not write in spaces below	
Copies made: 2 - Bureau (131-363) (AM) 1 - USA, Houston 3 - Houston (131-39) 2 - San Antonio (info) 1 - Dallas (131-7)		131-363-54	
		NOV 20 1957	RECORDED - 23
		STAT. SECT.	EX-103

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
INTERVIEW REPORT

MRS. HARRY (LOUISE) REESBY, 3965 Wedgway Drive, Ft. Worth, Texas, on November 13, 1957, stated she was employed by J. D. LATTA, which was a forwarding company, from about August, 1945, until the company dissolved about November, 1949. She was a clerical employee and worked in the Galveston, Texas, Office located in the Cotton Exchange Building. She stated MR. ARTHUR CLARK was the office manager and there were four female clerical employees, including herself. One of the women was MISS DOROTHY CARTER, who has since married. The last she heard, about three years ago, MISS CARTER had married and her name is believed to be MRS. FARROW or MRS. FARRELL and she was working at the Gas Company or one of the utility companies in Port Arthur, Texas. Another employee was MRS. ENA (E.C.) McCULLOH, who in 1956 was living at 4120 Avenue T $\frac{1}{2}$ , Galveston, Texas. She could not remember the name of the fourth clerical employee. She stated the four prepared the necessary shipping papers, filing and other clerical duties. She stated MR. CLARK remained in the office practically all the time, and was thoroughly familiar with everything handled by the four clerical employees.

She stated the company also had a Houston, Texas, Office in the Cotton Exchange Building and a MR. DAN WEBB was in charge of this office. MR. WEBB retired because of ill health, but she believes he was with the company until after the explosion of the GRANDCAMP ship. MR. WEBB sent her a Christmas card in 1956 from Ingram, Texas, which is a small town near Kerrville, Texas. She said MR. WEBB was a close friend of MR. J. D. LATTA and will know his present whereabouts. She stated it was her understanding that MR. LATTA was living on a ranch near Kerrville, Texas. She advised that in the Houston, Texas, Office, the office manager was a MR. J. H. WOLF, and the last she heard, he was living in Houston, but she has no idea of his address.

Interview with MRS. LOUISE REESBY File # 131-7  
on 11-13-57 at 3965 Wedgway Drive, Ft. Worth, Texas  
by Special Agent B. TOM CARTER

DL 131-7

MRS. REESBY advised one of her last jobs was boxing up all the records, so they could be shipped to the Houston Office. She stated she did not know if they were actually shipped or what happened to them after the employees at Galveston packed them. She stated MR. LATTA and possibly MR. WEBB would be the best source to determine what happened to the records.

She stated during the time J. D. LATTA was in business, the firm handled several shipments of ammonium nitrate, and she never at any time recalls hearing anything or seeing anything in writing that would indicate ammonium nitrate was of an explosive nature and dangerous. She stated up until the explosion, she was of the opinion this material was nothing more than a fertilizer and had no dangerous qualities. She advised she was working in the office at Galveston when the GRANDCAMP exploded. MR. CLARK was also in the office, and the employees all thought the explosion was a result of the fire reaching the fuel oil supply on board the ship.

She advised it was her understanding that E. S. Binnings & Company was a steamship company with offices in Galveston, and were agents for the French Line which included the ship, GRANDCAMP. Lykes Brothers Steamship Company, Inc. is another steamship company, and were agents for various ships including the ship RICHLYER. She stated so far as she knew, J. D. LATTA had no connection with either of the above companies, but the J. D. LATTA company did considerable business with both of these companies.

She pointed out she was merely a clerk in the office and that MR. CLARK, MR. WEBB or MR. J. D. LATTA would be the ones most familiar with the over-all operation of the company. She stated because of the above she would decline to furnish a signed statement.

- RUC -



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

1114 Commerce Street, 12th Floore  
Dallas, Texas

In Reply, Please Refer to  
File No.

November 18, 1957

RE: SS WILSON B. KEENE; SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP; Limitation of  
Liability, April 16 and 17, 1947  
Petitions of Lykes Brothers  
Steamship Company and Republic of  
France, Southern Texas Admiralty  
Numbers 1868, 1869, 1870

MRS. LOUISE (HARRY) REESBY, 3965 Wedgway Drive, Ft. Worth, Texas, was interviewed by SA B. TOM CARTER on November 13, 1957. MRS. REESBY appears to be about 55 years old, average appearance, neatly dressed, expressed herself without any difficulty. She stated she had tried hard to forget all about the explosion of the two ships (GRANDCAMP and HIGHFLYER) because of all the suffering caused by it. She was a clerk in the office of J. D. LATTA and was not sure about the operations of the company. She is not too sure of herself and states she doubts that she could explain exactly what steps are necessary in order to ship a load of ammonium nitrate from this country to France. She does not recall whether she assisted in preparing the ocean bill of ladings covering the shipment of ammonium nitrate by the two above mentioned ships. She is sure that she never heard anyone discuss the possibility that ammonium nitrate might be dangerous, nor did she ever read any correspondence indicating such danger.

100-2418-  
11/18/57

131-303-25  
ENCLOSURE

## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (131-363)

DATE: November 18, 1957

FROM : SAC, DALLAS (131-7)

SUBJECT: SS WILSON B. KEENE  
SS HIGHFLYER  
SS GRANDCAMP, etc.  
ADMIRALTY MATTER

OO - HOUSTON

Enclosed herewith is the report of SA B. TOM CARTER, dated November 18, 1957, at Dallas, Texas, also 4 copies of blank memorandum.

The following administrative data is set forth:

In referenced report mention is made of possibility that MR. J. D. LATTA may be residing at Kerville, Texas, which is covered by the San Antonio Office. Two copies of this report are being forwarded to the San Antonio Office as Houston may desire investigation there, if same has not already been handled. In view of the limited file in Dallas, no leads are being set out to interview the former employees of J. D. LATTA, as set out in interview with MRS. LOUISE REESBY.

Pursuant to request of Houston the copy of the Departmental request dated 10-14-57, and copy of report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING dated 11-2-57, are being returned herewith to the Houston Office, along with copy of blank memorandum.

REFERENCES

Houston airtel to Bureau, 11-7-57  
Report of SA JOSEPH J. DOOLING (A), Houston, 11-2-57.

- 2 - Bureau (Enclosures 6) (AM)
- 3 - Houston (131-39) (Enclosures 3)
- 2 - San Antonio (info)
- 1 - Dallas

BTC:nec  
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